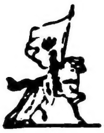
Everybody's



NUMBER TWO FEBRUARY, 1925 VOLUME FIFTY-TWO

If It's in Everybody's It's a Good Story

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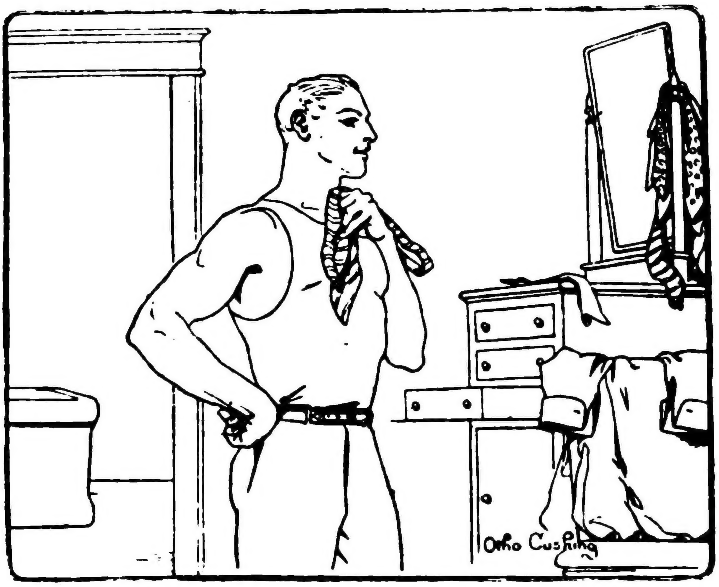
To men who would like to wear bright neckties



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Advertising section continued in rear of book

Everybody's

Vol. 52, No. 2 February, 1925 Sewell Haggard, Editor

The Mating *of* Pompalone

Masterful Ways Are Apt to Attain Their Object; but They Need to Be Keyed to Those upon Whom They Are Meant to Work

By T. S. Stribling

Illustrations by Harry T. Fisk

SUN YET LEE, the copra exporter, told me this story one evening as we strolled around the savanna in Port of Spain. We were passing an Italian villa, done in Barbados chalk, when a servant opened a huge gate and a man and a woman on splendid black horses galloped out and drummed off down the driveway. What made me turn and watch them until they were lost in the veil of the moon was the manner in which the man rode. The woman, clearly, was the bouncing product of a riding-school, but the man, I thought, must have spent much of his life in the saddle in one of three places on earth, Cossack Russia, the North American cattle ranches, or the South American pampas. I was about to ask a question when Sun Yet Lee forestalled it.

"That is the Magnificent Pompalone and his wife, the Lady Bettina," he said. "He came here some years ago from the Llanos of the Orinoco. I knew him as well as any one gets to know a *llanero* and a Venezuelan. Those were the days when society here in Port of Spain rather shunned him because it was understood that he got his fortune by some rather lucky murders and robberies."

"That," I said, "is supposed to form a certain bar, is it?"

"For a period it does, in this white world of the West," agreed my companion with a certain expression on his face; "but over here, time softens such informalities, time and a thoughtful handling of the fortune." He continued looking after the riders down the huge oval of the savanna, and after the hoof-beats died away he added rather acridly, "Although I was his first friend, you observed, I suppose, that they did not recognize me at all."

I was surprised at the remark. "Why, it's moonlight, Sun Lee!" I said rather blankly. "How could you expect them to recognize you in the moonlight?"

"Naturally I do not," returned my companion. "If they fail to see me when I pass them face to face at high noon under a Trinidad sun, then, as you say, how could I expect them to recognize me in the moonlight?"

Sun Lee's tones were impregnated with that subcutaneous rancor which I believe all Chinese feel when talking to or of a white man. I felt inclined to laugh, but something in Lee's manner kept me quiet. Presently he continued in the same vein.

"You see they have risen somewhat in society since then, the Magnificent Pompalone and the Lady Bettina. I understand the Governor had them at his last ball, which is something—since the Governor grants pardons. And so"—Sun Yet Lee made a little gesture—"why should he recognize me any more?"

I murmured something about friends.

"Friends? Surely you have observed, sir, that a white man measures his social progress much as a mariner determines his nautical speed; the one heaves over his log, the other heaves over his friends. Naturally, the faster he goes, the swifter he—" Sun Yet Lee broke off to lift a hand and waggle delicate fingers in the direction the Magnificent Pompalone had taken.

The Chinaman's opinion of my race and, I could but suppose, by inclusion, of me, left a little gap in our conversation which I found difficult to bridge. I stood looking rather emptily at the pale villa with its nine black windows of the second story just seen above the high wall. Presently I made the unnecessary observation:

"So you knew them?"

"When the Magnificent Pompalone was married," said Sun Yet Lee, "I stood up with him as best man. He came to me and asked it out of friendship. 'Sun Lee,' he said, 'every white acquaintance I have in Port of Spain has excused himself from standing up with me in my marriage ceremony. Now for the very reason that they will not come, out of the memory of Najalka, I ask for your kind offices.

"So I went. At the wedding, there were just two other men: the bride's father, who was a newly rich distiller by the name of Sherbrooke, and a threadbare nonconformist minister whom they dug up somewhere in town and induced to perform the ceremony. I remember how he kept bowing and smiling in the huge empty room as if everything were all right."

My companion stood in the moonlight looking at the villa and indulging in a private and mirthless smile at the lonely wedding he had attended. He stood so long in silence, leaning against the iron rails that enclose the savanna, that I thought I had heard the last of the matter when he took it up again at quite a different point.

AS I say [my companion resumed], we were friends, and I had served the Magnificent Pompalone on one or two occasions; so when a coolie boy picked his way into my shop on Tragarette Road and handed me a note, I was not surprised to see the huge envelope and the coat of arms showing a tiger rampant embossed on the flap which told me it was from the Magnificent Pompalone. The message, in his usual harsh handwriting, said:

> Find out all the details of Betty Sherbrooke's intimate life and come to my villa for four o'clock tea.

I was getting in a fair amount of copra that afternoon, but I make it a rule always to deal light-heartedly with my business, so I closed my door straight in the face of a string of carts loaded with at least thirty fanegas of copra and set off to find out what I could about Betty Sherbrooke.

I went to my friend Wong Lu, who runs a laundry on Richmond Street. As I had thought, my friend Wong did the Sherbrooke laundry and so for a long while I sat on the edge of his ironing table, talking to him and watching his iron smooth out cuffs and shirts and pajamas.

At six o'clock I came up this pitch walk and entered the little postern gate you see there where the bougainvillea leans over the top of the wall.

I found Pompalone in the breakfast room on the second floor giving on a back view from the villa. If Pompalone had not been seated at the table this breakfast room would have been rather an extraordinary affair, with black ebony window frames and between the windows murals of life-sized tigers. The damask on his table was not white but was embroidered in bars of black and gold reminiscent of the tiger's coloring. It would have been an extraordinary setting, I say, if the man at the table had not subdued it and brought it into tone, with his jet-black hair, sallow skin, wide nostrils and smoldering quartz-colored eyes. The rank indifference with which he picked his big white teeth with a pen knife reduced the murals to mere murals, the inconspicuous, the conventional.

As I entered between black and yellow portières he waved me abruptly to a chair on the opposite side of the table and began in his usual brusque fashion:

"What did you find out about the girl?"

"The Sherbrooke family," I said, "has lately acquired wealth."

"How did you learn?"

"The mother and father still wear cotton hosiery, and their children, a daughter and a son, wear silk."

Pompalone gave an impatient jerk of his head. "And the girl, Betty, what of her personal habits?"

"She has just taken up horseback riding. She has a completely new riding habit from boots to cap and crop. That only happens once, at the beginning of the fad."

"Is she strong?"

"She is framed on ample lines," said I. "Her handkerchiefs show that she uses little powder and no paint at all, so her complexion, whatever it may be, is natural."

The Magnificent Pompalone nodded. "That is the animal side of this Betty Sherbrooke. What about the girl herself, her spirit? Is she ambitious, full of fire? You must realize, Sun Yet Lee, that I want to marry a woman who will beget great children." In his rising vehemence the *llanero* set down his cup on the embroidered spread with such force as to break the vessel. "We men are handicapped, there, for after all our children depend mainly on our wives. There is where we fall!"

Pompalone arose and in his gestures had shaken the great purpleheart table, pulled the heavy cloth this way and that, upsetting half the vessels.

"WAIT, wait a moment," I begged him. "This girl Betty Sherbrooke is not what you suggest. I noticed an interesting point in her laundry. On her underwear she had embroidered a design for a coat of arms, trying it in different colors to see which would look best. Without doubt she has employed some antiquary to trace back her lineage to the English nobility, with an idea of assuming a crest. Or perhaps she may hope that her father will be knighted."

Pompalone nodded. "Well, that is something—her tracing back her lineage. I personally would regret to rest my claim to greatness on my ancestors. I start my lineage. I am the first Pompalone. That is my shield carved over my door, a tiger rampant. Nobody gave it to me. The men who crossed my path—suggested it.

"Still, after all, a woman is a derivative creature and one could hardly expect her to originate an escutcheon. If this comely wench, Betty, is thinking of escutcheons at all, that is something. All right, all right, we will have to try her out and see if she can bear super-children, for after all a man must chance it with some one. He can't be everything."

He made a gesture. "And she likes horses. She is learning to ride. Very well, we will have her a horse and a stable. There are too many garages, Sun Yet Lee, and too few stables. Nobody but a poltroon would exchange a horse for a machine. You can't spur a machine to death!" He stood frowning a moment, then his face cleared. "We must have horses for this jade who embroiders escutcheons on her underwear. I'll have a stable built right against that wall." He pointed toward a very high yellow wall which delimited his ground on the west side at the back of his villa. "We must please this hussy. Do you drop in from time to time, Sun Lee, to see how it looks." And with a gesture he dismissed me.

Well, the Magnificent Pompalone flung a great body of men to work on his stables and the new building arose just as ornate as his villa. It was of the same style of architecture; it was a minor villa for his horses—creatures he could spur to death.

At about the same time William Sherbrooke, the distiller, began erecting that mansion whose turrets you can see yonder rising above that banyan tree.

[I looked, caught a glimmer of the tower in the moonlight and nodded.]

That mansion is a replica of some old English castle. You know how newly rich colonials run to castles. Well, this construction swelled Pompalone's enthusiasm for the English girl. It showed her flair, the pulse in her blood, so he thought.

BETTY SHERBROOKE was often at the villa; she took a possessive interest in the stables her fiancé was building. And as I watched her and the Magnificent Pompalone together, I was forced to admit that she made a mate for him. She was quite as tall as he, finely molded, and was one of those cool blondes with glinting hair, sea-colored eyes and lips as red as the comb of a laying hen, which, of course [Sun Yet Lee made a gesture], was as it should be.

She had the persistent vivacity of a girl who was going out on an adventuresome lark and had made up her mind to go through with it, and—enjoy it. She was a foil to the Magnificent Pompalone, who regarded her with eyes that smoldered in his swarthy face and was preparing to receive her into a villa ornamented with tigers.

Under the hands of imported masons the stables grew upward in white blocks, round by round. I was in the grounds one evening when the top of the rising masonry had almost reached the level of the high yellow wall. Miss Betty had climbed up and was looking about her when I heard her call: "Oh, Pompalone! Just come up and look what a garden our neighbor has. What a lovely thing!"

I glanced up and the blonde girl in the brilliant sunshine on the white stone-work was rather a breath-taking sight. Pompalone went hurrying up the ladder, and out of curiosity, I followed.

Miss Betty was pointing. "Why, that is a little Buddhist temple, that thing with the gilded dome, and a little lake with water lilies and rushes and stepping-stones to gather them. Pompalone, I never saw anything so lovely!"

By that time I was at the top of the wall myself. All three of us stood admiring it silently. Naturally where their crude Caucasian eyes saw the obvious accents, I observed the nuances of the garden, the harmony of color under the gilded dome and its reflection among the pink water lilies in the pool, the massing of flowers and grass, and the effect of the mango tree in the corner which strewed shadows through the sunshine and qualified it. Well, such a jewel box really left our side of the wall, with its villa and stable, a pale, washed-out affair; but then naturally no Occidental can approach the color sense of the East.

"How I wish that were mine!" breathed Miss Betty after a long stare with her covetous Northern eyes.

"Sun Lee," said Pompalone, "find out who owns that garden."

"Why, a Hindu, naturally, Pompalone," said I, for I saw it lacked the delicacy of a Chinese garden.

The Magnificent Pompalone gave me a look and said dryly, "Find out the name of the Hindu, and the price of the garden."

"Pompalone," said I, "that garden hasn't the look of a garden that's for sale."

"True! True!" exclaimed Pompalone. "It's a low thing to go about asking the price of beauty—to dicker for loveliness! God's lightning! No wonder beauty escapes this race of English hucksters in Trinidad. A beautiful thing, like a beautiful woman, should be seized, Sun Lee!" He struck his fist on the wall. "You shame a man to ask him the price of his garden! You shame a woman to ask her hand in marriage! Abduction and robbery, Sun Lee, are the highest forms of esthetics. Caramba! There can be no doubt that a man admires your handiwork if he will slit your throat for it, or that he loves a woman if she maddens him!"

Miss Betty had both fingers in her ears. "Pompalone! Pompalone! How often have I asked you not to talk like that!"

"Not talk like that!" echoed Pompalone. "And yet you yourself are trying to trace back your ancestry to the English barons, men who had blood in their veins and took what pleased them, man, woman or thing. No wonder you honor them!"

"That was a long time ago, Pompalone," said Miss Betty a little shakily.

"Yes, nowadays the slogan seems to be, 'Let your grandfather do the robbery.' At any rate it is impractical for me to climb down into this little garden and take it, so, Sun Lee, I will have to ask you to find out who owns it and offer him his price."

THE next day I went to my friend Wong Lu and watched him roll cuffs through his mangle. His place smelled pleasantly of steam and fresh clothes; for the smell of a laundry among odors is much as the taste of chop suey among foods. We talked of this and that, and presently I said: "Wong Lu, who is this wealthy Hindu who continually sends you to launder silk robes of solid colors, yellow, purple, red, the *kapra* of men and the *ouranee* for women?"

Wong Lu pondered a moment. "You must be speaking either of Dookie Ran or Rhamba Singh."

"Which has children?"

"Dookie Ran."

"Then I mean Rhamba Singh. Let me see, he is the old coolie who buys cacao beans down on Victoria Street."

"That's the old man, skinnier than I am and the color of nutmeg."

I left the laundry and walked on down to Victoria Street. Rhamba Singh had a little hole in the wall which led back to an old stable yard. Rhamba Singh had covered a part of this yard with pieces of tarpaulin and tin and stray planks and so had rigged up a shelter for his stock. Under this were bags of cacao beans in rows and the whole place was heavy with the sweetish odor of cacao, with a hint in it of curry, which came no doubt from the old coolie preparing his own noon lunch.

The old Hindu himself was working like a porter among his beanbags. He wore a breech clout, a single shirt flapping about his loins and a turban. Then I realized I was in the presence of a philosopher as well as an esthete, and if I meant to buy the garden I must act with consideration.

After I had priced some beans and bargained for three sacks, I sat down on the pile, drew a cigarette out of my bamboo case, lighted and breathed in the smoke. As I talked the smoke floated out of my mouth and nostrils.

"Rhamba Singh," I observed, "it requires a man of wisdom, like you, really to enjoy anything, a fine horse, a private temple, a garden—"

The old coolie looked up at me without a trace of comprehension in his cinnamon face and grunted.

"I say," I repeated, "it takes a wise man to enjoy a garden. Look for example at these wealthy Englishmen in Port of Spain: their homes are palaces, their business houses are mansions and their clubs châteaux. They go between these places in luxurious motors with never a break from year to year and yet they never understand why they grow weary of existence, like children with their bellies full of sweets."

Rhamba Singh looked at me blankly with his wrinkled old face like dried mace and grunted, "Want more beans?"

I inhaled again and considered. "Four more sacks. And their women, Rhamba Singh. What an absurdity, running about the streets with their faces naked for any one to see! They heap their wives together at dances and banquets half naked as if they were determined to cloy even desire by a prodigious surfeiting and lose love in the gray ashes of their days."

OLD Rhamba Singh nodded. "That is true, Sun Lee. Desire is in the eyes, and the thoughts. Only a fool eats the songbird in his garden."

"That which you say, Rhamba Singh, is the second thought of wisdom, not the first thought of youth."

"That is true, Sun Lee; the first thought of my youth was quite different. It was one night in Mangalore in Ghats when I saw a nautch girl dancing. Had it not been for that girl, Sun Lee, I would still be a Sudra in Bengal. I can remember her anklets and armlets and castanets and the plates of burnished brass over her breasts. They were gold in my eyes, Sun Lee. I pushed my way through the crowd and got to the man who beat the drum and gave him a copper pie to tell me her name. It was Najalka. I asked what she was worth. The drummer spat.

"'You spent your last pie to buy her name, and now you ask what she is worth—take care, you dog of a Sudra, lest your shadow fall on my foot.'

"I stood aside so the light fell on me in a different way, but still I had her name, and as I stood drinking her through my ears and eyes, I thought, 'What if Najalka were dancing for me alone in some garden by a temple?' and Sun Lee, my bowels melted within me and I went away.

"The next month white men from the West came to Mangalore to indenture labor and I put my fingers on a pen while they wrote. Then they put me in a barracoon with six hundred and twelve Sudras and pariahs, all mixed without order except such as we could keep in the barracoon where we ate and slept. We stayed there three months waiting for a ship to come and take us to the West. Some of us died and were never carried to the Tower of Silence, but were thrown into the bay there at Mangalore. But I lived on, Sun Lee, because somewhere ahead of me down the gardens of the years, I could see a nautch girl dancing.

"At last I sailed with four hundred others and we stopped at the Fijis, at Samoa, at this and that point; finally my papers were given to an Englishman here in Trinidad.

"I worked for him ten years, when my indenture was finished and I might stay here or go back to India. I stayed here and wrote to Bengal, and after a year I received a letter saying that Najalka was dead, but that she had left a little daughter, a little Najalka, a pretty creature who danced and who was worth eight hundred rupees.

"But I did not have the eight hundred rupees, so I picked up sticks in the jungle and burned them and sold charcoal here in Port of Spain; I bought mangoes on the estates and sold them in the streets; I helped lade the ships at the wharf. But by the time I had eight hundred rupees, Sun Lee, I was old enough to realize I must have other rupees to keep Najalka's daughter. One does not bed a fawn in a sty. But when I had more rupees, came another letter from Mangalore telling me that the daughter of Najalka had died in childbed and that a little daughter, another Najalka, was in her stead.

"So I sent them my eight hundred rupees and told them to teach her to sing and dance until she was worth these rupees and then to send her to me. And so I came at last with Najalka, the daughter of Najalka, the daughter of Najalka. She is very like, Sun Lee, and when I gaze upon her a long time, I see the mother of her mother dancing in the torchlight at Mangalore; the same steps, the same songs, and my heart beats, and yet, after all, Sun Lee, no man can unroll the years."

AFTER such a tale a white man might well have been stolid enough to offer Rhamba Singh money for his garden, but we Chinese have had the benefit of training and courtesy; our parents before us were Chinese. So I crossed my hands on my chest and bowed to Rhamba Singh and walked backward out of his door and wished him more years and greater wisdom.

I was no sooner in my own shop than a boy came flying in, shrilling: "Sun Lee! Sun Lee! I have been looking everywhere. The Magnificent Pompalone is storming for you. He has sent runners to Wong Lu's, to the chop suey place, to the fan tan dive—" By this time we were both hurrying toward the villa.

I found the Magnificent Pompalone in his ballroom on the second story where you see the nine windows set down the front in three groups of three windows each.

He was tramping up and down the polished *syp* floor which shone so that it looked as if two Pompalones tramped the ballroom, one inverted and one erect. He was flinging away his black cigars as quickly as he lighted them. I entered as quietly as I could and I said with a placating gesture, "So you have seen the girl with the purple *ouranee* and the gold bangles."

He turned on me with a furious gesture. "Sun Yet Lee! Have you allowed me to waste my time on that moon-faced wench when such a dream, such a madness—just beyond my wall—"

"My dear Pompalone!" I hurried, for he seemed coming to pull me down. "I had no idea there was such a girl—"

"What! What! And you standing there describing her dress and her bangles! Don't trifle with me, Sun Lee!"

"Really! Really!" I cried, for he was advancing on me. "I deduced her costume from the garden, the color of the garden. I—I knew what it had to be, Pompalone, you understand."

"How did you know there was any girl at all!"

"Oh!" I waved my hands. "The garden."

The Magnificent Pompalone glared at me a moment longer, then made a gesture. "Well, that's neither here nor there. I climbed up to look at my garden this morning, and she was there, bathing in the pool among the water lilies. God's lightning, Sun Lee, but I was seized with madness. I put my hands on the top of the wall to vault inside when I realized that a forty-foot drop might injure even me. I started to go and climb down by the mango tree, but that first hesitation, that single forethought, brought on a troop of others. I thought if I were down I could not escape with her at once. I could not climb back up with her and lock her in the villa. Besides, the villa was not safe. Port of Spain was not safe. This damnable government of the English!

"I knew I dare not look a moment longer or I would fling myself down and lose her. And yet, Sun Lee, I have found all my life long, the man who hesitates at a woman or a crime, loses both. So listen, this must be done! In the morning be you hid in the garden when she bathes. Have gags and bonds ready—"

"But, Pompalone," I interrupted, "would you not prefer to have her consent?"

Pompalone stopped in his pacing to stare at me. "Her consent! I, Pompalone, stand pleading with a slip of delight, *may* I take her, *will* she do me the honor to come to me! Ah-h-h! Sun Yet Lee, you sound as sickly as these Trinidadian English!"

"But look!" I pressed the point. "You have been wooing this Betty Sherbrooke very patiently for days and weeks—"

The Magnificent Pompalone looked at me and made an enigmatic reply. "Miss Sherbrooke inspires patience."

"Still we would best not go at this thing helter-skelter, Pompalone," I counseled. "The Hindus have a festival of Hosein only two days off, and on that day old Rhamba Singh will surely be in the processional with the others. If you could find patience till day after tomorrow, that would be the surest."

He began tramping again, the two images of Pompalone, the one above, the other below the *syp* floor. Finally he turned and waved a hand at me. "God's lightning! Go, man, and arrange it so. I get the girl on the festival of Hosein, and, Sun Yet Lee, do not mention her to me until that day."

The festival of Hosein is a mighty day with the coolies here in Trinidad, and in the two days preceding I fell to work gathering the things I would need to kidnap a woman; a thin rope ladder, a delicate pair of handcuffs, some silk bands to tie her ankles and knees and wrists and elbows, and a tiny little gourd for a gag, a small pretty one I found down at the native market with yellow and green stripes. I smiled to think how the vendor would look if he knew what I wanted with it. For the silk bands I chose orange and scented it with frangipani. I would have liked silver handcuffs for the capture, something carved like bangles.

HERE Sun Yet Lee paused for several moments musing over the point and finally asked me if I had ever arranged to kidnap a woman. I was a little shocked and told him I had not.

My companion nodded and looked up at the moon. "It is no dull enterprise, I assure you. Since that day, I have often thought that civilization made a great backward step when men ceased to acquire wives by capture. That surely made the world duller both for men and women."

"But, Sun Lee," I cried, "a man's moral nature forbids such a thing! In every gentleman there is an innate courtesy, a chivalry which prevents—"

My Chinese companion lifted a hand. "Have you ever laid out little handcuffs and a tiny gag and perfumed silks to capture a beautiful woman—"

"No!" I cried. "Certainly not!"

"Then you are in no position to say what you would feel or how you would act."

"Well, confound all this moralizing!" I cried with a beating heart. "I know I wouldn't do such a dastardly thing, but—tell me what happened in the garden!"

ON THE night following the day I had this interview with Pompalone [Sun Lee continued], that is the second night before the festival of Hosein, I thought I would best go to Rhamba Singh's garden and see precisely how it lay so that I could work out the finer details of the capture.

There was a full moon that night, and this long pitch walk, the banyans over it, the white villa and the towers of that mansion yonder all lay precisely as they look now. The only difference was, the stables of the Magnificent Pompalone, which you cannot see from here, were unfinished.

I came in quietly through that side gate and did not go up to the villa at all, because Pompalone had given me strict orders not to mention Najalka until I had her bound and ready to deliver to his arms. I went in through that side gate, followed the shadow of the fence around to the stables in the rear and so to the top of Rhamba Singh's garden wall.

I got over into the shadow of the mango tree, hooked my rope ladder between the bricks, slid over the top, and a moment later was down on the inside. It was like dropping into a bath of perfumed air. The night was filled with the smell of orchids and lilies, and down in the pool, beneath the lily pads, I could see the gleam of the little gilded temple. It was a sweet and delicate garden, but as I stood in it, the thought came of old Rhamba Singh living in the filth of barracoons, journeying in the foul hold of labor ships, and working for ten years for his freedom, all for this garden and this girl, and then for me, a Chinese gentleman, to come and disturb his nest. That was no happy thought. "Ah, Sun Yet Lee!" I mused. "Your ancestors who are looking down on you tonight, what are they thinking about you?"

I was standing in the shadow of the mango with the pity of the moonlight and the flowers in my heart, when there came the whisper of a step on the grass and a voice like a little bell said in Hindustani, "Sahib, how came you here!"

I turned with a little start and saw the girl standing quite near me. The moonlight falling in splashes over her brought a catch to my throat, but I managed to say soberly enough, as if I addressed such a creature every day:

"Down this rope ladder, Najalka."

She stood looking at me with eyes that were utterly black from the moonlight. "Are you a friend of Rhamba Singh?"

I was tempted to lie, but I said, "A rope ladder is the friend only of the man who uses it, Najalka."

"Then why did you come here, sahib—to steal? There are only flowers in this garden."

My pulse was growing in my neck and I answered a little unsteadily, "That is why I came here, Najalka—to steal a flower."

"To steal a flower! Why, Sahib, I will give you one!" And she reached up and broke a sweet spray from a vine.

When she offered it, she was so fair, and her face was so like a lotus petal, and she and her mother and her mother's mother had been dancing girls trained and tutored to please men until with them it was like breathing. When I touched her hands, my voice broke and I knelt and pressed both her palms to my face and I trembled.

"Oh, Najalka! These are the flowers I meant, and without them, I will die."

THE girl stood quite still for a moment, and then she gave a laugh like a little bell very softly rung. She took away one of her hands and pushed it through my hair.

"So it is I—I, Najalka, you have come for at last."

I peered up into her face and drew in my breath. "Can it be you were looking for me, Najalka?"

"I was looking for some one, sahib, I did not know whom. Every dawn since I was brought here, I have looked out at the pool and flowers and thought: 'Surely some one will come and steal me away today from this eternal moping in old Rhamba Singh's garden.' "

My arms glided up about her in amazement. "But, Najalka," I whispered, "you sweet dark flower! Does Rhamba Singh only keep you like a bee orchid in his garden?"

"He eats me with his eyes," she whispered impishly. "Ah, the devouring eyes of old men! How they eat—eat—eat girls and gardens, diamonds and temples and lily ponds! They eat us all up, sahib, and we get swallowed down into the old man's purse. His purse! Ugh, his purse!"

"His purse!" I repeated blankly, for Najalka's fancy was too airy even for me.

She shook a little perfumed finger in my face. "Oh, yes, right down into his purse!" She laughed, like a soft ringing of little bells. "Because that is the only place an old man can hold a girl."

A sound frightened us. Najalka heard it first. It was a slow step in the house at the other end of the garden. A lump leaped in my throat, but before I ran up my rope ladder, I caught her to me and pressed my lips against the flower of her mouth.

"Tomorrow—tomorrow night," I whispered, almost choking, "at this hour, and we will fly, and now—"

She pressed her lips passionately to mine. "Every—every night, O my sweet love. Now hurry—hurry, he is coming!"

I went up the rope ladder like a chinchilla, whipped it up after me and walked away on the first story of the stables with a beating heart. When I got to the ground a voice said in my ear:

"Ah, is that you, Sun Yet Lee?"

My throat jumped tight. I stood staring and speechless at the Magnificent Pompalone. . I swallowed, and then I answered, I think in a composed voice, "I was looking over the ground, Pompalone."

"I see you were," said Pompalone.

"I didn't mention it to you, Pompalone, because you asked me not to refer to the topic again until I was ready to—to act."

The Magnificent Pompalone looked at me. "That was very thoughtful of you, Sun Yet Lee."

"I try to act for my friends," said I, "exactly as if I were acting for myself."

"Gratitude will bankrupt me," said Pompalone. "And now, Sun Lee, come with me into the villa. We will spend the night there together. We have preparations to make tomorrow, our last day before the festival of Hosein. We must get a racing launch to carry us into the delta of the Orinoco; we must hire negro watermen who can fight as well as sail, and who stick at nothing. Come ahead, don't hang back. Decidedly you would best sleep with me tonight so that we may start together early in the morning."

A weakness came over me. I looked at the snow-white villa in the moonlight and suddenly it seemed to me to be a huge white tomb, and the nine windows in three groups seemed to be a name carved upon the tomb, the name "Sun Yet Lee." With this evil fancy sticking in my throat I followed Pompalone inside.

IT SEEMED to me the aura of Najalka clung about me as visibly as my own clothes. A lingering perfume of her condemned me. It seemed impossible for Pompalone to glance at me and not know that I had just come from her. . . .

He directed me into his great bedroom where he had two huge ebony beds, with tiger heads of yellow *poui* carved in high relief and inset into the headboards. It was a dismaying bedroom. The silken covers were striped in black and orange. He directed me to one, then threw himself on the other, with boots, hat, coat and everything on, and immediately became silent. Whether he slept or not I did not know, and I did not dare to lift my head and see.

Whether I myself slept or not, I cannot say, for when a man is anxious and miserable for a girl, day dreams and night dreams so run in his head he cannot say which is which.

At dawn, Pompalone arose as casually and started about his plans as directly as if he had simply sat a moment on the bed and had arisen immediately to go about his affair.

He commended my light rope ladder and took it from me with the words, "If I had had this yesterday morning, Sun Lee, my life might have been different."

We worked all day at hiring the boat and the boatmen, a racing motor to run from the villa to the wharf. When we were back that evening, I offered to go out and get provisions for our voyage at the market, but he said that had been attended to by a ship chandler. I suggested that I go to a drug store for ether to give the girl so we could carry her to the boat unconscious. He said he never used ether in kidnaping women.

I grew more and more nervous. At last I turned to him earnestly as we sat for a second time on the huge ebony beds under the yellow tigers' heads.

"Pompalone," I said, "why are you going to take this girl, Najalka? You know she is not the type to beget children and found a great family. She is a wisp, a fragrance, a fruitless flower. Now Betty Sherbrooke has in her veins the conquering blood of England, her castle tower shines through the window—"

Pompalone made a gesture. "What you say is true, Sun Yet Lee; Betty Sherbrooke would mean a great family—but what is a great family? A family, Sun Lee, is a man's reaching out for some desire which he himself never did attain. The passion for a family is a man's resignation of himself and a hope that his sons may fare on toward some unknown goal. But this Najalka, Sun Lee"—he swung his head toward the garden—"is the goal itself. In her, Life curls and breaks and flows back down the beach into the sea again. She is Life's aristocratic moment. Up to her leads the past; she embodies the present; and as for the future, Life regurgitates and sets once more about lifting a passion flower from the muck. It is quite within a strong man's power, Sun Lee, to decide whether he will be the bloom or the stem which conveys the ascending sap."

I knew there was no need of talking further with the Magnificent Pompalone. For there was a certain truth in what he said. All men, this world over, no matter how staid and conventional they may appear, in reality are waiting for some woman. That is why all men, young or old, wistfully interrogate every woman's face, asking: "Is this she, with whom I may bloom and die? Or am I still to tread the round of life through my children?" That is what the Hindus really mean by Nirvana.

SUN YET LEE broke off his discourse and stood looking away through the moonlight. And in my own heart came half-remembered wistfulness and bootless quests.

And what does a man hope in his son, in that strange vicarious immortality of a son? We hope our sons will be more fortunate than we. Not in wealth, not in honor, not in fame, for these are footling things, but we hope that Life will deal more kindly with the son than with the sire, and there we let it rest, with our real disappointment unuttered in our hearts.

AT DAYBREAK [began Sun Yet Lee] we heard the drums of the festival of Hosein.

The Magnificent Pompalone arose from the black and gold bed, as if he had lain down in passing, and went to the window.

"They begin early," he said.

"Then you have never seen it before."

"No, this is my first year in Port of Spain."

"Your first year and your last day, Pompalone."

He nodded.

A distant drum was throbbing in my ears like a pulse. Somehow it reminded me of Najalka, and I wondered what she would think of my bringing the terrible *llanero* to our tryst.

I looked out of another window and saw the van of the coolies come into view around the pitch walk under the banyans. The wail of reed instruments rode up to me on the rumor of the drum. A scattering of children came running ahead of the procession, and the marchers came into plain view carrying a great paper tower. Eight coolies bore it on a litter, a high paper tower that was quite as high as the second-story windows in which we leaned. On top of the tower was the bloody head of a slaughtered goat. A stick in its neck held the head upright, and we could see its eyes behind the down curve of its horns. It was a sacrifice to some coolie god, and they would carry the tower and the goat head down to the wharf and fling them in the river; such was their custom.

The procession was grotesque. Some of the men wore only a breech clout, others a shirt, others a *kapra* of muslin wrapped about their bodies; some were in English clothes, some wore turbans and *alpagartas*. And their songs rose in a strange melancholy that harked back to the cruelties and mysteries of India. At intervals among the marchers moved men with censers and as they waved their silver baskets, the air was filled with the frail odor of sacrifice.

In the procession, Pompalone pointed out a figure in a robe and a turban.

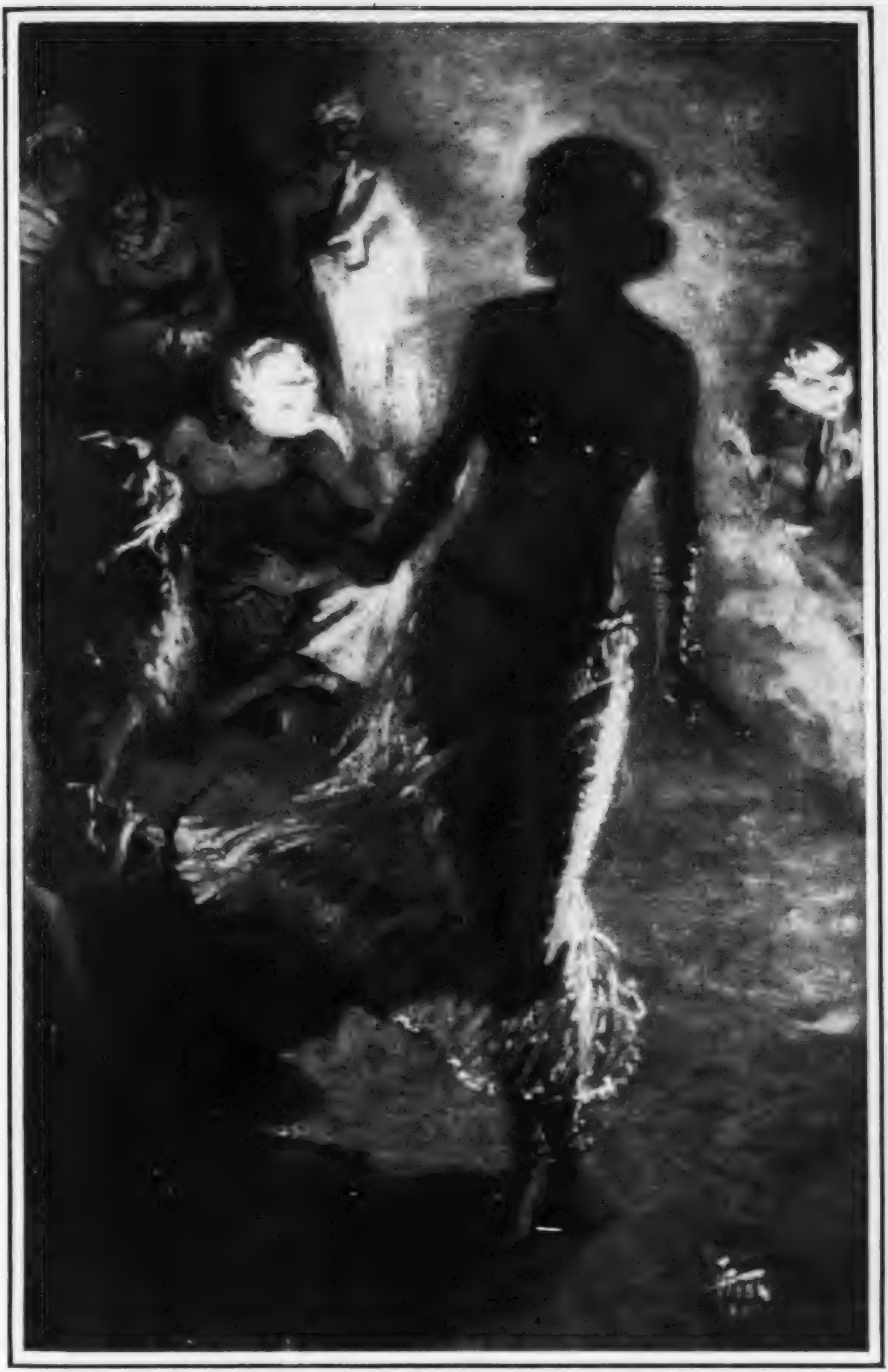
"Look, Sun Lee, there is old Rhamba Singh."

I looked and recognized the old man, who, oddly, was looking up at me.

Pompalone drew inside and came and laid a hand on my shoulder. "Now," he said, "we can go."

I took a last look at old Rhamba Singh in the procession of Hosein, and my bowels melted within me. My legs grew so weak that I could hardly walk. I turned and followed Pompalone below.

THE *llanero* made not the slightest effort at concealment, although there was indeed no cause for any. As he climbed up the ladders of his half-built stable, his nostrils expanded and I saw the veins lift in his neck. And in my own ears a pulse began to murmur, for it is impossible, sir, to set about abducting a woman casually, as if she were a doe. My heart beat, and I



"One night in Mangalore I saw a nautch girl dancing," said old Rhamba Singh. "Had it not been for that girl, I would still be a Sudra in Bengal."

went scrambling up the ladder behind Pompalone. And I whispered, "Perhaps I would better go first, Pompalone, to keep from frightening her."

I suppose he did not hear me. He went down first. The garden was empty. The gilded dome of the little temple gleamed down beneath the lily pads. And the thought of my last moment here with Najalka, on this very spot, swept over me like a great grief. I followed after Pompalone toward the house with a dead heart. "When she sees me," I thought, "what will she think of Sun Yet Lee? Oh, Sun Yet Lee, what do the shades of your ancestors think now? For it is one thing to steal love for yourself, but it is a surpassing treason to betray that love to another." And I wiped my eyes covertly on my sleeve and over and over in my head whispered: "What will she think of you? What do your ancestors think? O Sun Yet Lee!"

The Magnificent Pompalone strode on straight toward the house, and I after him. I passed the door of the little temple with the gilt dome. And out of the corner of my eye, I caught a glint of gold and crimson inside.

I stopped, I stood in my tracks. My eyes started from their seats and my chest grew so heavy I scarcely could breathe.

I heard my name called but I could not answer. My tongue was as dry as a parrot's and in my head a voice whispered, "Today, Sun Yet Lee, is the day of your death, though you live to be as old as K'ung-fu-tse."

Pompalone was shaking my arm. "What is it?" he growled. "Are you dumb, Sun Yet Lee? Has your rabbit heart—" And then he saw what I saw. . . .

All of her bangles and anklets and *napools* and *caras* bedecked her, and the delicate plates of gold curved about her little breasts as she lay before the image of Buddha, with her hands together so that her thumbs and forefingers touched, just as did those of the Buddha.

She might have been asleep, save that her face had been gilded, after the custom of the Hindu dead; thus, she looked very like the image which brooded above her with thumbs and forefingers together.

I cannot say what the Magnificent Pompalone thought, but my own heart was filled with a strange tragedy not common among men. Of a man who walks among women looking wistfully into this face and that querying: "Is it she? Is it she?"

And when he sees the face—it is past.

OUTSIDE, on the entrance of the temple, old Rhamba Singh had written with the last of his gilt paint:

"Najalka, the daughter of Najalka, the daughter of Najalka."

Conquest

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FASCINATING characterization marks "Conquest," by Jay Gelzer. Ethan Howard, handsome, sophisticated, prodigiously successful, realizes that to complete his happiness one more conquest is essential—that of a woman's love. Pride in the possession of the best, in the luxury of living well, in being an important factor in the financial world, all these are futile unless he has some one worthy of sharing them. His search for the one woman who will satisfy his need makes a novel of compelling charm. Coming in—

March *Everybody's* Out February 14

Neither Innocent nor a Bystander

Romantic Anita Had No Thought of Going into the Police Court When She Sought to Comfort a Cast-Off Lover

By Lucian Cary

Illustration by Joseph A. Maturo

ANITA sat that August afternoon in her window, where she could see Leicester Road without being seen. She had a novel in her lap, one of those novels that every one must have read or at least have tried to read. But she was too deeply excited to read. She was for the first time in her life playing an active part in a scandal.

She was possibly playing the most active part. Hasn't somebody said that the real principal of an intrigue is the confidant? If nobody has said it, somebody will. It was Anita to whom young Phil Warren had confided his intention of eloping with Mrs. Remington.

The fact gave Anita a profound satisfaction. Hitherto her knowledge of intrigues had come to her second-hand, or third-hand, or from the newspapers. She had been an outsider, a mere innocent bystander. Other women had known the thrill of anticipating a social explosion. Other women had known the still deeper thrill of being able to say afterward: "Yes, I knew it all the time." But Anita had always been a mere listener. Until now she had never—never once—had anything to tell.

Anita's part at the moment was to wait until Phil and Mrs. Remington had eloped. Phil had promised that he would drive through Leicester Road on his way north with Mrs. Remington. That would be the signal. Anita would know what to do after that.

The first thing was to mail a letter that Phil had written and entrusted to her, a letter announcing to his firm in Broad Street that he had been suddenly called away. After that she might confide the truth to her husband, to Wilbur—but only to Wilbur. And then she was to serve as liaison officer. Elopements, like war, require such services.

Waiting is peculiarly stimulating to the conscience. Anita wondered if she ought not to have done something to stop this affair of Phil Warren's. But what? She had reminded him that Frieda Remington was several years older than he. She had talked common sense to him without any result. Phil was infatuated. She could not talk to Mrs. Remington because Phil had not told Mrs. Remington that he had confided in Anita. She was forbidden by her loyalty to Phil to talk to Mrs. Remington. Besides, Mrs. Remington was a woman of the world. Mrs. Remington had a way with men—a way which she had once exercised upon Wilbur, to Anita's distress. Anita was not so sure that she would have preserved Mrs. Remington from the ultimate folly if she could. Anita had a grudge against Mrs. Remington.

But now her grudge seemed a little thing, and unworthy. She was sorry for Mrs. Remington. The punishment would be so severe. Phil Warren was young—only three or four years out of Princeton. He would be forgiven. But Mrs. Remington was a woman of thirty—at least. Mrs. Remington would be ruined.

Anita started up. She must stop them. She must stop them at any cost—at any risk to her own dignity. Her eyes turned instinctively to the telephone. But a suburban telephone is not wholly trustworthy. And the Sparborough telephone had in the past failed to preserve the privacy of important communications.

Anita rushed downstairs and out on the terrace and looked up Leicester Road.

Phil's roadster was not in sight. Anita considered. The only thing to do was to watch for it, to observe its approach in time to rush out and stop it. Anita sat down on the tiny porch to watch and wait.

SHE looked at the watch on her wrist. It was five o'clock. Anita wondered what had delayed them. Phil Warren had said half-past four at the latest. Anita looked up the road. Nothing. She wondered what Wilbur would say. Wilbur would be home in an hour. She could talk—for the first time. Wilbur would be incredulous. Wilbur would pretend to a large, masculine indifference. But she knew Wilbur.

Anita looked at her watch. It was five minutes past five. Anita walked slowly down toward Leicester Road that she might see farther. But she saw nothing. She walked back to her seat on the porch. Anita looked at her watch for the third time. It was eight minutes past five. Was it women who were said never to be on time?

Then she saw Phil's roadster. It was coming fast. It was coming in a small cloud of dust. Anita ran down to the walk, ready to flag it, ready to run in front of it and force Phil to stop.

Phil was alone in the roadster.

The car came to a sudden stop, the rear wheels sliding in the gravel. Phil climbed out. He came slowly toward Anita. His habitual jauntiness was gone. He looked tired, spiritless, dejected.

"Why, Phil!" Anita said.

He looked into her eyes. He smiled a faint, bitter smile.

"She changed her mind," he said.

Anita had a sudden rush of tenderness for him, with a quick, almost irresistible impulse to stroke his brow and pat his head and whisper soothing words. But one can not stroke the brow and pat the head and whisper in the ear of a handsome young man in full view of Leicester Road.

"Oh," Anita cried, "how could she!"

Phil shook his head. "I only know she has," he said.

For a moment Anita looked into his eyes, so full of pain. He seemed so young. He was in fact about Anita's own age—possibly a year younger. But he seemed like a little boy who had been unbearably hurt. It is bad enough to be jilted by the girl to whom one is engaged. But to be jilted by a woman who is married is somehow more of a shock to one's belief in the essential rightness of the world.

"Anita," he asked, with a humility that was new to him, "would you do me a very great favor?"

She looked up at him eagerly. "Oh!" she cried. "If there is anything I could do to help—"

"I want you to go to dinner with me. I need to talk. I can't talk to anybody but you. Will you go?"

"Of course." She looked down at her frock. It was a simple frock of white crêpe de chine, a particularly happy frock.

"Don't stop to change," he begged. "We'll go to St. Cloud."

"Isn't that awfully far, Phil?" she asked. She had never been to St. Cloud. But she knew Phil had. It was at St. Cloud that he had dined so often with Mrs. Remington that summer. That was why he wanted to go there now.

"We can do it in an hour and a half," he said.

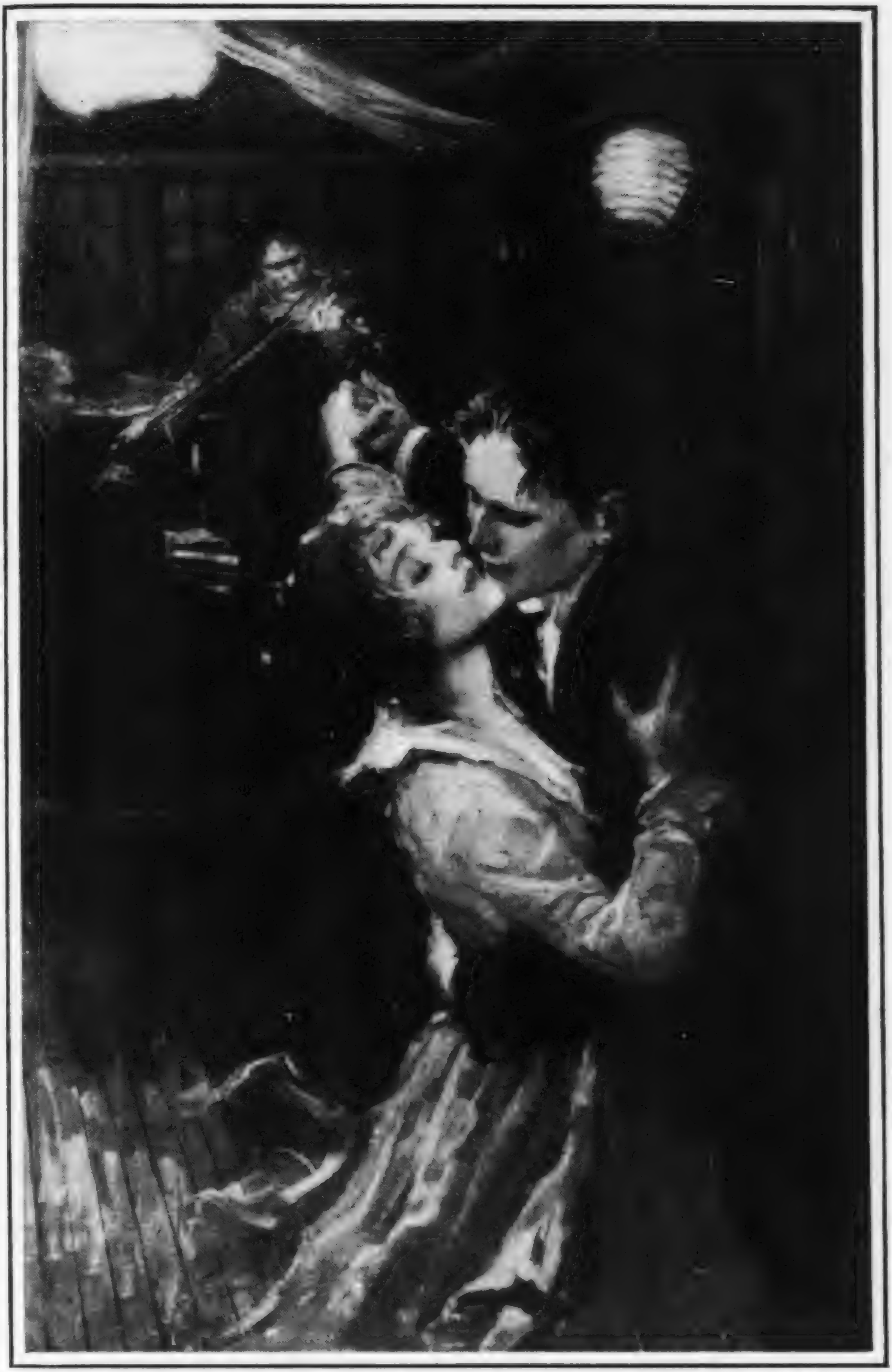
"I'll have to leave a note for Wilbur."

Anita rushed into the house, found a hat, a wrap, and paused at her desk to write the note:

Dear Old Thing:
I'm going to dinner with Phil Warren. He's in trouble and needs somebody to talk to and I feel I must help him out if I can. I don't know when I'll be back. Don't tell anybody where I've gone. And don't worry about me. NITA.

She wondered as she ran down the stairs why she had written that last sentence. Why should Wilbur worry about her? What was there to worry a husband in his wife's going to dinner with a young man who is hopelessly in love with somebody else? Nothing. And yet, somehow, something.

PHIL drove grimly, his eyes on the road. Anita, sitting beside him, was content to wait. She had a sense of well-being that might have been due to the perfection of the dying August day; or to the entirely smart and altogether becoming clothes she was



They danced to the gaily sad and sweetly bitter music of the violin. Phil's cheek touched hers, and without volition she turned up her mouth to his.

wearing; or to her anticipation of an excellent dinner. Only it wasn't. These things were merely the setting. The true source of her happiness was the knowledge that she was soon to hear all about Phil's affair with Frieda Remington. The evening promised her the ultimate rewards of the confidante.

They came to St. Cloud, to that admirable, that unassuming, that discreet inn which it would be a desecration to call a roadhouse even if, essentially, that is what it is.

Phil found a table on the terrace, under an awning, overlooking the river. Anita looked at the river, marching toward the sea in a still-shining band but trailing mists of mauve; at the blue hills rising tier on tier toward the horizon; at the afterglow of sunset, red and gold against a pastel sky. Phil looked out across the river, too. It was that moment when a summer day seems to pause, reluctant to leave its own warm, still perfection and give place to the faint, cool breeze that brings all the mysteries of the dark. From somewhere within the house came the sound of a muted violin, playing that gaily sad, that sweetly bitter waltz that Kreisler has made of a Viennese folk song and called "Paradise."

They smiled at each other and needed no words until the moment was over.

"This place," he said to Anita when the violin had finished, "always gives you the feeling of being alone. Besides, it has associations. I have been so happy at this table."

Anita smiled her understanding. She knew that he was trying now to be a man of the world, to admit the depths of his sentiment without feeling them. She saw that Phil could easily have wept but that he had no intention of doing so. What he wanted was to bury his passion for Frieda Remington by reliving, just once, an evening of the sort from which it had been born. She could help him by being gay and sad, by being bitter and sweet—above all by being a woman of charm.

The waiter coughed behind his hand. George took the card.

"Are you hungry?" he asked.

"I'm going to be," Anita said.

Phil smiled his approval. "Then," he said, "we shall have to have a daiquiri—they do them well here." He turned to the waiter. "Make them double. And do you happen to remember the dinner I had here last night?"

The waiter bowed. "Assuredly," he said.

"Give us that dinner over again—precisely," Phil said.

"It was an awfully good dinner," he explained to Anita, when the waiter had gone on his errand. "Little clams, and sweetbreads *sous cloche*, and a salad, and a filet, and things."

Anita sipped her double daiquiri. She had no intention of drinking it all. But she liked the tang and sting and spiciness of it. She did drink it all, and found in it the same golden glow that the dying day had communicated.

The waiter brought the clams, and two candles, and Phil ordered a white wine for her and a tall, the tallest possible, glass of Scotch and soda for himself.

"FRIEDA loved Scotch," Phil began, and paused. "I suppose she liked going to dinner with me and dancing and my devotion. But she didn't really care about me."

Anita reflected that this was probably a precise statement of the truth but she refrained from saying so.

"Of course she didn't really care about her husband either," he continued, "or else she wouldn't have played with me so hard."

"No," Anita admitted.

He sat frowning, his eyes on his glass.

"I wonder if it was that cable that decided it."

Anita waited for him to explain. She had heard nothing about a cable.

"You see he cabled her that he was sailing from Southampton today. He would be home in six days. She got the cable about half an hour before I called to take her away with me. It was the first message she'd had from him in three weeks."

Phil finished his Scotch and signaled the waiter for another.

"Of course," he mused, "it couldn't really have been the cable. If she had honestly made up her mind to go away with me she wouldn't have stopped at a cablegram from her husband. Such things don't happen."

Anita could not deny it. She saw Frieda Remington as a restless woman who exploited her charms in irresponsible flirtation—as other women exploited sport or charity or art. The only inexplicable thing was that she did it so well. Anita granted

Frieda a reluctant respect—for her technique. Perhaps there was something real underneath. Perhaps she was truly unhappy. But that didn't excuse her making Phil so unhappy.

And how did she get away with it? How did a woman induce a man she wasn't in love with to make love to her? And having done so, how did she escape the consequences? How did she explain herself to him? Frieda Remington could never seriously have supposed that she was going to elope with Phil Warren. But she had let Phil suppose it. Anita was so curious as to how Frieda had explained herself that she spoke with a certain exasperation.

"But what did she say?"

Phil leaned forward quickly. "She said his cablegram made her realize how he counted on her, how he needed her. There was no way of reaching him by cable—and you can't cable such things anyway. She said he was coming back to her. She said she couldn't let him come back—without any warning—and find her gone for good—and she'd been gone for six days."

"She might have thought of that sooner," Anita said.

"Of course she might. Of course she ought." He spoke bitterly, with such a flame of anger in his face that Anita was shocked. Did he, after all, realize how shamefully Frieda Remington had treated him? But already the anger in his face was giving place to tenderness.

"And yet," he asked, "how could she? It's only a week since I told her I loved her."

Anita thought to herself: "Doesn't the poor boy know that she made him tell her he loved her—that she did it all?" She smiled to herself involuntarily as she realized his innocence.

"Oh, I know!" Phil said hotly. "You think she's a flirt—any woman would. But she isn't. She's real."

"Of course she's real," Anita said soothingly.

"She's the realest thing," Phil cried. He paused and smiled, a smile reminiscent and proud, at the thought of how real Frieda was. He was living again the evening before. His smile became ecstatic.

"Last night," he said, "we were halfway through dinner—as you and I are now. We'd hardly said a word—we were so happy—just being together—and looking into each other's eyes. And then they began to play a waltz inside. Frieda loved to waltz. It was like tonight—there was nobody here. We went inside and the dance floor was deserted and the lights low and the violinist was standing in the dusk in the corner by the piano playing very slowly, very softly. We danced alone—in that dusky room."

WITHIN the house the muted violin began a half-forgotten popular song. Anita recognized it: "That Naughty Waltz." For a moment she listened. Phil listened. She raised her eyes to his. They looked into each other's eyes and with a common impulse they rose and walked toward the empty dance floor within.

Phil held her tenderly—as if she were a precious but fragile flower—and as they danced Anita yielded more and more to the slow, sensuous rhythm. The summer evening, the talk of love, the music—and perhaps the double daiquiri—had softened her. She moved in a kind of vague but delicious dream, a dream in which happiness was a charm, a spell, without past and without future, fleeting, but authentic while it lasted. She was scarcely conscious of thinking or feeling; only of being.

They paused, as the music ceased, in the middle of the floor.

"Do you know," Phil whispered, his arm still around her, "that a woman is like a vase—a living vase—of flowers? Frieda is a vase of roses—red roses. But you"—he hesitated, hunting for the right name—"you are a gardenia."

Anita laughed softly—as if she were pleased.

The violinist picked up his bow and began the Kreisler waltz—the waltz he had played earlier in the evening—the waltz that was gaily sad and sweetly bitter. He played it poignantly, as if he loved it. They danced and as they danced Anita let herself sink into, let herself rest, in the warm, caressing sea of dream. In the last measure Phil's cheek touched hers. Without volition she turned up her mouth to his. They kissed.

The dance was over. Hand in hand, they walked back to the table on the terrace, where the candles flickered and guttered in the little wind from the river. Phil ordered another Scotch. Anita sipped her wine.

Phil laid his hand on hers. "You know," he said engagingly, "I don't know where I'm at—I'm beginning to think it's you I love and not Frieda—that perhaps I was in love with you all the time."

"You're a dear boy," she said. Somewhere, deep in the complexities of her mind, there reverberated a slight shock at the ease with which this phrase came from her lips, at the timbre of her own voice. "But I'm afraid," she added, "that you've had too much Scotch."

"Oh, no!" he protested. "Don't say that. Don't try to spoil it. It's quite too beautiful to spoil."

Anita laughed softly. She was surprised and pleased at the gentle, murmurous, acquiescent quality of her own laughter. It was quite too beautiful to spoil. She had merely felt momentarily, out of some old tendency to resist the charm and the warmth of life, that she ought to check it while she could. Was that what happened to women like Frieda Remington—that they couldn't check it until it was too late? Then perhaps women like that were wiser than she had supposed.

Phil smiled into her eyes, drank deep, and shook his head wisely.

"What does it matter whether it's Scotch, or love, or a muted violin? It's not ours to question or reason why," he misquoted gently. "Ours but to enjoy and live."

"I'm sorry," Anita murmured.

Phil squeezed her hand. "I don't mind your saying it's the Scotch," he said. "Because I'm so sure it's you—just you, Nita."

ANITA glanced at her watch. It was just midnight. What was Wilbur thinking? But that didn't matter either. Wilbur would not begrudge her one beautiful evening. And they were only an hour and a half from home.

"It's early yet," Phil assured her. "There's lots of time. There's time to have one more dance with you. I can't bear to think of not having one more dance with you."

Anita looked over her shoulder toward the dance floor.

"Oh!" she cried. "The violinist is going home."

She could see him snapping the case shut on his instrument. The pianist was gathering up his music.

"There's a phonograph," Phil assured her. He rose to his feet. "Come," he said, "let's dance. Let's have a last waltz together."

They walked slowly across the terrace into the dim, empty room, their shoulders touching at every other step. The head waiter appeared.

"We want to dance," Anita said, with the air of one who expresses an irrational but dear caprice.

He smiled benignly on them, adjusted a record on the machine, and retired discreetly. Phil put his arm around Anita tenderly, caressingly. She yielded gladly to his arm, with a little involuntary sigh of content. And as the music began, she moved again in that vague but delicious dream—in which mere being was delight. But after a few steps Phil paused, his arm still around her.

"It isn't a waltz," he said. "It's a fox-trot. It must be a waltz."

"It must," Anita agreed.

Phil approached the machine sternly.

"That's not a waltz," he said accusingly. "That's a damn fox-trot. It won't do."

Anita laughed. It was in keeping with her mood that Phil should hold the machine responsible and yet it was funny. Everything was in keeping and yet everything was funny.

Phil seized the record under the needle and sailed it out of the window into the river. Anita clapped her hands in approval. He bent to select another record from the rack.

"That's a damn fox-trot, too," he grumbled, as he read the legend. He sailed that record after the first and hunted for another.

"All fox-trots," he said and sailed the third record. But the large disc turned as it left his hand, described a sharp arc, and went through the next window but one, which didn't happen to be open.

"Phil!" Anita protested at the crash of glass. But she could not protest seriously. She liked his reckless mood. On second thought it was altogether fitting that offending records should be thrown into the river. And what were windows for—if not to be broken when one felt like breaking windows?

The head waiter appeared. "Monsieur," he asked, as Phil sailed a fourth record through the window, "could I be of assistance?"

"Yes," said Phil sharply. "Get me another Scotch highball."

"I regret," the head waiter said suavely, "that the cellar is now locked. We have to be so careful nowadays."

Phil smiled at him confidentially. "Let's unlock it," he suggested.

The head waiter pursed his lips gravely and shook his head.

"Impossible," he said.

Phil straightened up and looked at the head waiter with grave disapproval.

"Impossible? On a night like this nothing is impossible."

The head waiter raised his eyebrows deprecatingly.

"I regret," he began, "I regret most—"

"Just keep your regrets," Phil said. "There are too many regrets in the world now. I don't approve of regrets. I don't believe in regrets. I can't drink regrets."

Anita giggled. She had not intended to giggle. But she did.

"But, monsieur—" the man began again patiently.

"Buts are just as bad as regrets," Phil said severely. "I don't like buts either." He laid his hand on the head waiter's arm. "My dear fellow," he added, "forget your buts and live."

The head waiter signaled to Anita with one eyebrow. Anita realized she must help him out.

"Phil," she said, "you must take me home."

Phil gave her a puzzled, uncomprehending look. Then suddenly he remembered. He tugged at his hip-pocket. He withdrew a pint flask.

"Ah!" he said, holding up the flask. "There is Scotch, good Scotch."

"Phil, dear," Anita essayed again, "won't you take me home?"

Phil bowed. His mood had changed. He was no longer interested in waltzes. He was charmed to take her home.

PHIL drove gravely, without speaking. But as they came to the brow of the first of the series of hills over which the Albany Post Road winds toward New York he stopped the roadster and took out the flask.

The moon had come up, bathing the country below them in that beguiling half-light, so unreal, so disturbing, so entrancing. It was that moment when the mystery of the night is friendly, and the sense of responsibility ceases to function.

"Anita," Phil said, "let us drink to the beauty of life."

He solemnly extended the flask to Anita. And it seemed to her altogether fitting that she should drink to the beauty of life. She knew it was silly. But she did not dislike being silly. She loved being silly.

Phil took the flask. "To you," he said, "to the night, to all beautiful things."

He drank and reached for the gear-lever. They sped down the long hill in the cool half-dark, the head-lamps giving long beams of yellow light, paths of light into which the car rushed and swung and swayed.

Each time they came to the top of a hill, Phil repeated his ritual, until the Scotch was all gone and they came to Peekskill.

Anita saw that there had been a fire. An engine still pumped beside the plug at the corner and lines of hose lay across the street. They would have to go round. But Phil drove on. Anita laid her hand on his arm.

"Hadn't you better turn off, Phil?" she asked.

Phil shook his head.

"It won't matter—it won't matter in the least," he said as they bumped over the first hose.

It wouldn't have mattered in the least if a policeman hadn't seen them and called a halt. Phil paid no attention. The policeman blew his whistle sharply. Phil drove on. Again the policeman blew, a shriller, louder blast.

Phil's answer was to step on the gas. The maneuver might have been entirely successful if the hook and ladder truck ahead hadn't taken that moment to turn. The way was completely blocked. Phil had to stop.

The policeman came running up, shouting angrily at Phil.

"Tut, tut!" Phil said to him.

The policeman reached for Phil's collar. Phil swung his fist. Anita got a hard blow under her left eye from an elbow. A fireman came to the policeman's assistance. Anita heard a thud as the policeman's stick descended on Phil's head. The policeman and the fireman dragged Phil headfirst out of the car. Anita got out and followed the struggling trio to the police station.

At the sergeant's desk, the policeman

paused. The sergeant turned the pages of his blotter and picked up his pen.

"Charges?" he asked mildly when Phil had given his name and address.

"Disorderly conduct, vile and abusive language, driving when drunk, resisting an officer, and—" The policeman paused for breath while the sergeant's pen scratched across the pages.

The next moment Anita realized that they were leading Phil down the corridor.

"Look here," she said. "What are you doing?"

The sergeant answered succinctly. "Locking him up."

Anita sank down on the hard wooden bench that lined the wall.

"What about me?" she asked.

"You'd best go home," the sergeant said kindly.

Anita wondered if she could drive Phil's roadster. It was of a different make from her own little coupé. She could manage it. But she couldn't leave Phil. She must get him out.

"Look here," she said to the sergeant, "I want to telephone to Sparborough." The sergeant pushed the instrument on his desk toward her.

IT WAS a ten-minute job getting the Sparborough operator but Wilbur answered so promptly that Anita knew he'd been waiting up for her.

"Oh, Wilbur!" she cried. "Phil is arrested and you've got to help me get him out."

"Where are you?" he asked.

"In Peekskill—in the police station."

"Stay there," said Wilbur masterfully. "I'll be there in twenty minutes."

Anita sank back on the hard bench with a deep sigh. How good of Wilbur not to ask questions, not to complain! How sweet!

Wilbur came. Wilbur made himself responsible for Phil's reappearance at a later date. Wilbur loaded the now nearly unconscious Phil into the little coupé. Anita sank happily back against the cushions and closed her eyes. Once she waked up for a moment. Once she asked herself what Sparborough would say when this story got abroad. But she went off to sleep again. What did it matter what Sparborough might say?

Wilbur delivered Phil at his own front door and drove Anita home without saying a word. He helped her upstairs and into bed without asking a question. Anita felt interestedly but with caution of her cheek below her left eye. It was badly swollen and excruciatingly tender.

"Dear," she said to Wilbur, "bring me a hand mirror."

Wilbur grinned and obeyed.

Anita surveyed herself with awe and consternation. She had what another might have described as a beautiful black eye. But it did not look beautiful to Anita. It looked horrible. Anita burst into tears.

WILBUR sat down on the edge of the bed and stroked her head.

"It isn't permanent," he said soothingly.

"I know," she said between sobs, "b-b-but I—I—I've been such a fool and you are so sweet and so forgiving."

"Don't you care," Wilbur whispered.

"But I do care," she wailed.

Wilbur put his arm around her. Wilbur held her close. Wilbur kissed her.

Anita put her arms around his neck. Anita controlled her sobs. Anita found herself smiling.

"What," she asked, "will Sparborough say?"

"It won't matter what Sparborough says," he assured her.

Anita thought back. She remembered her mood of the afternoon when, waiting for Phil to drive by on his way north with Mrs. Remington, she had congratulated herself on being no longer a mere listener, but an actual participant. She smiled. The smile grew, in spite of herself. It had been a beautiful evening. It had been worth all it cost.

"Of course, dear," Wilbur was explaining, "nobody can possibly blame you. Everybody knows that life is like that."

"Like what?" Anita asked dreamily. She was already half asleep.

"Why," said Wilbur earnestly, "everybody knows that it's always the innocent bystander who gets hurt."

Anita chuckled to herself—a faint, private, going-to-sleep chuckle.

"What's funny?" Wilbur asked.

"Nothing—dear," she murmured. Her eyes closed. Her breathing deepened. She smiled as she slept.

Next month: another sparkling story by Lucian Cary.

A Novel Complete in This Issue

The Goat Without Horns

The Mystic Power That Dominates the Black Minds of a Whole Island Holds a White Woman in a Strange Captivity—Until Destiny Comes Along

By Beale Davis

Illustrations by Otto J. Gatter

THE *Texylvania's* quarter-deck was gay with the glow of myriad multi-colored lights, beneath which white-uniformed officers and women in bright-hued gowns danced to the music of the battleship's band. Strings of bunting stirred lazily in the warm velvety breeze that at nightfall had come to temper the blazing tropical heat. Captain Wilson was giving a dance, and all of Port au Prince's foreign colony had come aboard the ship.

Leaning against the rail, watching the dancers, Felix Blaine found it hard to realize that the squalid island capital at which he had arrived by the morning's boat from New York was scarcely a mile distant.

He turned and stared out across the dark bay to the darker hills which rose abruptly from the water's edge. High among them red signal-fires flashed intermittently, as the coast natives told their fellows back in the bush of the doings of the *blancs*, the foreigners, whose unwanted battleship was the only vessel in the harbor. Faint but insistent came the broken beat of tom-toms. Somewhere back in a palm-fringed clearing, the voodoo people were dancing.

Haiti! Already Blaine felt something of its mystery and sensed a secret world of the natives, jealously guarded from the curious eyes of outsiders. But how different it all turned out to be from what he had anticipated when he had sailed from New York on this whim-prompted journey, and how disappointing!

From the minute of his arrival, one disappointment had crowded hard on the heels of another. Instead of the laughing, carefree natives of his imagination, he had found the pier crowded with a sullen, half-naked rabble, as dejected and listless as the whip-scarred ponies which drew the dilapidated street carriages. His hotel, he grudgingly admitted, would have been attractive if the people had been different. Larsen, the Norwegian proprietor—bulky, red-handed and obsequiously oily—Blaine disliked on sight. The one visible guest was typical of all out-of-the-world ports.

He was skeleton-thin, a fact that his loose-hanging, dirty linen suit emphasized and a tearing cough explained. "Remittance man," Larsen garrulously volunteered, as he showed his new guest to a room. "He's English—Captain Enright, he calls himself. Lives back in the bush and comes down once a month to get his money and tank up on white man's liquor. Can't say I blame him. I'd stay drunk, too, if I'd seen all that he has back there with the natives."

Remembering the big Norwegian's elephantine air of mystery, Blaine smiled as he turned again to watch the dancers, or rather, to watch one of them. Like most of the ship's officers, he had eyes for only one woman, the beautiful Madame Simone.

She was dancing with Lieutenant Murrell, an old friend of Blaine's, and as his eyes sought out the couple, the question which he had been trying to answer ever since he had been presented to her came again into his thoughts. Why was this woman, young, cosmopolitan and lovely enough to be remarked anywhere, living in Haiti, where—according to Murrell—she had been for several years under circumstances that were unusual, to say the least?

NOBODY seemed to know much about her. She had come to Port au Prince from somewhere in the south of the island, had taken the best house in the town, and had declined to know any of the foreign colony—with one exception. Mrs. Ashton, wife of an American engineer who was building a road somewhere along the coast, and Thérèse Simone were inseparable. Consequently, when the *Texylvania* arrived and Madame Simone appeared as a guest at one of the captain's dinners aboard, the colony became as excited as only small foreign colonies can be. The fact that Captain Wilson had known her in Europe, when she was Thérèse Arnaud, was another morsel of tea-table gossip, and her immediate and outstanding popularity with the ship's officers was quite enough to make this gossip not altogether charitable.

The advisability of permitting her to be really one of them, the women discussed at length. This proved unnecessary, for Madame Simone continued to ignore their existence. Parties aboard ship, she went to; and in return she gave dinners to the officers at her house to which Julia Ashton was the one woman of the colony to be invited. There it ended.

This was more than enough. Headed by Mrs. Crewe, the wife of the British Minister, the women dug up a three-year-old sensation and, in self-defense, declared that they could not know any woman with so mysterious a past.

It was a mystery. Murrell told Blaine what he knew of it. The one definite fact seemed to be that, very soon after her arrival in Port au Prince, Thérèse Arnaud had married Georges Simone, a Frenchman, recently come over from Paris. Less than six hours after the wedding, he was murdered by a native. Who the native was, or why he had killed him, nobody ever discovered. Equally inexplicable was the fact that Madame Simone at once disappeared for three months. Where she went, or why, no one ever knew.

With repetition, the story grew until the other women made of Thérèse Simone the flaming woman of Port au Prince. All of which she ignored, thereby increasing the venom of the feminine half of the colony, the respect of the masculine and the curiosity of both.

As she drifted with Murrell among the dancers, Blaine found himself wondering at an insistently inappropriate bit of jewelry she wore, so out of keeping that even his man's eyes noted it. Otherwise she was perfect. The lines of her bright green gown accentuated her strong slimness. Its shade brought out the high lights in her coppery brown hair and accentuated the camellia whiteness of her tapering arms and beautifully modeled shoulders. A string of unusually good pearls hung down to her waist. In short, she was as nearly perfect as good taste and a Paris dressmaker could make her. With the glaring exception of the bangle. Tight around her left arm, just above the elbow, was an armlet, quite three inches broad and of heavy East Indian beaten-gold work.

Blaine laughed aloud at himself. What possible difference did it make if the mysterious, beautiful lady elected to wear an incongruous bit of jewelry? She danced divinely and he wanted a dance with her, even though the most he could expect would be a few steps.

Thérèse Simone smiled up at him as they swung into time with the waltz the band was playing. "Murrell tells me that you are to be on the island only two weeks—until the next ship. Is that so?" she asked.

Blaine nodded.

"Then tomorrow night, unless you're already engaged, come and ride with us. Moonlight rides are our most thrilling amusement. They really are fun. And you'd better ride one of my ponies. Larsen's are terrible, I believe. Would you like to join us?"

"I'd love to."

"Good! Then it's settled. We will all meet at my house at about seven and start from there. As an added inducement, I'll promise you a very good cocktail before we start."

MADAME SIMONE was as good as her word. When Blaine arrived the next evening, he found half a dozen officers there before him, and Madame Simone seriously concocting a drink in the biggest shaker he had ever seen.

"I'll say 'How do you do?' nicely as soon as I'm through with this," she called out, smiling over her shoulder at him. "But until it's done, I don't dare. These Navy men are terribly critical about drinks, and I have a reputation to uphold.

"Here, all of you walk up to the bar," she added a moment later, pouring the drinks into thin, Viennese glasses which crowded a silver waiter that a white-coated servant placed on a table beside her.

The clatter of unshod hoofs on gravel drew the attention of every one to the gates at the end of the long driveway that wound through the brilliant garden. Eight or ten officers were riding in.

"Good Lord!" Thérèse exclaimed. "I must have asked every one I saw last night, and they're all coming and bringing their brothers with them. Poor men! There are so many of you, and only Julia and me. Julia," she explained to Blaine, "you'll find, is Mrs. Ashton. She's the most perfect woman in the world. Her one fault is that she refuses to ride, so you won't see her until we get back. But when you do, you'll love her. Come in," she called to the arriving cavalcade. "Your cocktails are waiting, and I think there are sandwiches and things in the dining-room."

Smiling and shaking hands with the new arrivals, she looked very young and, in spite of her costume, very feminine. Her white riding breeches were unmistakably from a London tailor. A plain white shirt, open at the throat, was as clearly an importation. In place of a belt she wore a brilliant orange scarf. Another of the same color was knotted about her neck. Her bright hair was covered by a Panama hat, jammed tight down over her head, its narrow brim shading her vivid, laughing face. High black boots, reaching to the knee, incased her narrow feet and slender legs. Blaine could think of no other woman who would have looked anything but a musical-comedy jockey in this costume. Thérèse Simone wore it with an unconsciousness that made it seem almost conventional and distractingly attractive.

She waited until the men had finished their cocktails and then led the way to the dining-room, which opened off the broad porch. "Help yourselves, everybody. I've no idea what there is. And please don't anybody eat very much, or there'll be nothing left for late-comers. I'll do better for supper, I promise."

The table, laden with sandwiches and cold meats, gave no evidence of the advertised scarcity. A side table seemed equally well equipped for any possible taste in drinks. In the agreeable informal confusion, Madame Simone seemed to achieve the impossible and to be everywhere at one time, see everything, talk to every one, all with no apparent effort.

Only once did Blaine detect a lapse. She was talking to him, and in the middle of a sentence looked quickly, almost apprehensively, he fancied, over her shoulder. It surprised him that her searching glance was directed at none of her guests, but through a doorway that opened into an inside room. It was done so quickly that he either would have forgotten it altogether, or would have put it down to imagination on his part, had he not caught its repetition later, as she stood on the steps outside, waiting for her pony. This time her gaze was focused on a shadowy corner of the porch, now almost dark in the quick-falling, tropical night. It was unmistakable, and in it there was something he did not like—something furtive.

THEIR party, like a small but very noisy army, pattered through the streets. Not a native was to be seen. As usual, Port au Prince was under martial law, which a most insecure president had put into force as a precaution against revolution, the one form of Haitian politics.

They rode for an hour before they turned back. Most of the time Blaine's pony was beside Madame Simone's.

"And so you are to be with us only until the next ship. It's too bad that you find our island so unattractive."

"That's hardly fair. I booked my passage the first day I was here, before I had a chance to form an opinion. But now that it's done, I suppose it must stay as it is," he replied, and felt his first tinge of regret at the thought of leaving.

At the edge of the town, the foremost

riders were halted by a half-dozen native sentries, surly and inclined to make trouble.

"One minute," Madame Simone said, and rode quickly up to the front. Blaine could not understand what she said to the soldiers. She spoke very rapidly in Creole, the patois, but there was a new note of abrupt command in her voice.

"*Passez, passez,*" the leader called out, and as quickly as had the others, disappeared into the shadows beside the road.

"What did you say to him?" Felix asked, riding up beside his hostess.

"It's not what I said, but what I did, that got results. I gave him a little money." But this did not explain the terror in the native's voice when he had called out to them to pass. Blaine looked at her keenly, but it was too dark to see her face.

"Why should giving him money terrify him?" Blaine's tone betrayed his skepticism. "I don't understand."

"No?" Madame Simone answered indifferently. "You'll find a lot of things difficult to understand here, if you stay long enough."

"I have already." He was sure that she realized that he was referring to her.

"My advice is, don't try to understand," she counseled, and urged her pony to the head of the party, where she stayed until they arrived back at her house.

Waiting for them they found Julia Ashton and two men who had arrived too late to join the riding party. Mrs. Ashton, Blaine liked at once. Jolly, comfortably plump, anywhere between thirty and fifty, she was the type of woman equally at home in a Yukon mining camp and in a London drawing-room.

SUPPER was gay and the two hours' ride had provided everybody with an appetite sufficient to do justice to the food and excellent Moët and Chandon which Madame Simone served.

"It must be the champagne. I can't conceive of anything else which could incite a desire to sing in any woman who has eaten as much as I have," she announced when, supper finished and cigarettes lighted, there was a general move in the direction of the porch and its big, deep wicker chairs. "No, no. I don't want anybody to come with me," she admonished as those nearest turned to follow her. "I want to sing, and I'm going to sing, but I'm going to do it alone. Then I can strum and gasp without causing unnecessary suffering. Run along outside, all of you. And do be noisy. Port au Prince will feel so cheated tomorrow if it has nothing to disapprove of. You must all help me to maintain my horrible reputation. I wouldn't lose it for worlds. It's such a protection."

It was plain that Madame Simone really wanted to be alone, and her guests followed Mrs. Ashton to the porch. Blaine wondered if, despite their hostess's words, they were expected to sit quiet and listen. Emphatically, they were not, he discovered. Julia Ashton at once launched into a story, too full of local allusions for the newcomer to follow, but evidently amusing. No one paid any attention, it seemed, to the soft chords and softer sung phrases which floated out in snatches from the open doorway.

Then a hush began to creep over the laughing crowd. First one man, then another, became silent until there was absolute quiet. Leaning back in chairs, two or three on the big wicker couch, some sprawled on the tiled floor, the men sat in the darkness, the ends of their cigarettes glowing intermittently. The compelling sweetness of the voice which drifted out to them held them all.

The songs were unfamiliar to Blaine. One was light and airy and French, another full of the haunting sadness of Hungarian folk songs. Some were sung to the end, some left off halfway—just as the singer's mood drifted.

There was a moment's silence. Blaine was afraid that it was the end. Then, from inside, came the opening bars of "Depuis le Jour." He was not musical, but "Louise" happened to be one of the very few operas he really enjoyed. He closed his eyes and listened, realizing that until now Madame Simone had no more than sketched her songs. Now she let herself go, forgot herself in the music.

She sang exquisitely, perfectly, and her accompaniment was as flawless, but in spite of it Blaine was conscious of something unfamiliar and disquieting. The song was nearly ended before he realized what it was.

Mingling with the singer's voice and weaving itself into the piano's accompaniment was the monotonous throbbing beat of a distant tom-tom.

IT WAS almost cool when, shortly after sunrise, Blaine set out alone before breakfast for a ride on the old, broken-down French highway which formerly wound smoothly upward from Port au Prince to the big plantations in the hills.

Market women were descending in a straggling procession to sell their wares in the open squares in the town. Those on foot walked beautifully erect, balancing great shallow baskets of fruit and vegetables on their heads. Others, atop little mouse-colored donkeys, already overloaded under bulging pannier saddles, urged their little beasts on with sharply pointed goads.

His ten days in Haiti had accustomed Blaine to these women in their one-piece garments and wide-brimmed straw hats covering bandanna-bound heads; but as he rode past them on the hillside they again evoked a question which, with increasing frequency, forced itself into his thoughts. What could there be to hold Madame Simone, a brilliant cosmopolitan, among the half-savage people of an island where even the country, once the little strip along the seacoast is left behind, is as wild as Africa itself?

Fruitlessly conjecturing, trying to fit together the baffling pieces of the puzzle of Thérèse Simone which, one by one, he had collected on the island, he ceased to pay attention to his surroundings until, turning a sharp curve, he saw Madame Simone a half-mile ahead. As on the night of their first ride she was dressed in white breeches and shirt, a bright scarf around her waist. Touching his pony with his spurs, he quickly overtook her.

At the sound of his approach, she glanced back over her shoulder, and Blaine fancied he detected a shadowy frown of annoyance, which quickly dissolved in a welcoming smile.

"I never expected to see you a convert to early-morning rides," she called out as he rode up. "It's worth it, though, isn't it? Nothing could be lovelier than this." She nodded her head toward the mist-clouded valley beneath them.

"Yes, it is beautiful. But I'd be much more in the mood to enjoy it if I hadn't been in too big a hurry to start to take time for my morning coffee. Consequently, just now I'm too conscious of a very insistent emptiness to be enthusiastic about anything but food, and lots of it."

"That won't have to worry you very long. Pétionville is just ahead of us. Beyond that is bush and more bush. Even this road gets tired of trying and gives up. But Pétionville has a very civilized little inn presided over by Madame Gerot, an old Frenchwoman. Maybe you've heard of it."

"Of course. The Navy raves over her breakfasts. Now's my chance. Be my guest, for a change, and give me the pleasure of repaying a tiny bit of your hospitality. Here's a hotel a little less impossible than the one in Port au Prince. Come and have breakfast with me, will you?"

Madame Simone considered. "I had intended to stop just long enough for coffee, so that I could get back before it really begins to get hot, but—yes, I'm going to change my mind and stay."

At the inn, Madame Gerot herself showed them to a table set under a flowering tree in the garden and then hobbled off, assuring them that breakfast would be served at once. Sitting across from her, Blaine realized that this was the first time he had ever been alone with Thérèse Simone, and somehow conversation, which never had been difficult with her, was not so easy. She showed no inclination to help him, but luckily, almost at once, a giggling native maid appeared with a tray of steaming dishes.

Thérèse lifted the top of one set before her. "Look! The most perfect omelet that was ever cooked," she exclaimed, as enthusiastic as a greedy schoolgirl. "Um! Smells heavenly, too, and it's full of mushrooms. Let's eat it and talk afterward. It's much too good to be allowed to get cold."

"All right," Blaine agreed with a very undignified grin.

THIS agreement neither of them kept. Laughing a good deal over nothing in particular, each exhilaratingly conscious of the other's presence, they talked and bantered through a long-drawn-out meal.

"There," Thérèse announced, putting down her fork, "your third cup of coffee emptied the pot, and as I've just swallowed the last of the omelet, I'll stop gorging and smoke. You'll have to, too. There's nothing left."

She pushed back her chair, lighted a cigarette and crossing her legs, sat swinging one booted foot and regarding her companion through a haze of smoke. "I'm really too lazy to move, but as the sun has almost succeeded in getting in here, I suppose I'll have to. Let's go in. The porch will be cooler."

Together they walked up the sunny path. "It's going to be unbearably hot, riding down now," Madame Simone observed. "I think I'll stay here until the afternoon."

"May I stay, too?"

"Why not? There's no more reason for you to ask for sunstroke than for me. Besides, in spite of the fact that all the women in Port au Prince—because I won't be bored by their stupid parties and stupider selves—assume that I love to be alone to brood over my lurid past, I find people who can talk of something other than themselves and their servants a big help in this God-forsaken country. Do stay."

It was on the tip of Blaine's tongue to ask why she stayed in Haiti if she found it so boring. Then he reconsidered. Just why, he didn't know, but there was something in Madame Simone's reserve which made even the simplest personal inquiries seem impertinences.

"Then that's settled," he said, instead. "Now what shall we do with our day?"

"Let's picnic. Go find Madame Gerot and ask her to fix us a basket. Bring it along and I'll show you the loveliest spot in the whole island—and consider yourself very much honored, too," she added, her eyes sparkling. "You're the very first person I've allowed to see my discovery."

As Blaine hurried to carry out her orders, few who knew him in New York would have recognized in this boyish, smiling young man the very serious and eminently successful Felix Blaine of Wall Street, whose name already carried no little weight in the world of affairs.

The place to which Thérèse led him, a ten-minute walk through the tangled bush, was all that she had claimed for it. Fern-covered hills arose almost perpendicularly on either side. High above their heads overlapping trees shut out the sun. In the agreeable gloom, flowers bloomed everywhere among the ferns, and a clear little stream trickled musically.

"What do you think of my discovery?" Thérèse demanded, seating herself on the soft grass. "To me it's absolutely perfect. I can think of nothing that could make it lovelier."

It was lovely, and for once the people approached the perfection of the setting. Thérèse had thrown her hat on the ground beside her, and the copper-brown hair tumbling loosely about her face made her appear more than ordinarily youthful. A faint flush colored her face and slender neck. Her eyes were blue-black in the gloom.

Blaine, already noticeably tanned by his days in the tropics, his close-cut, fair hair damp and trying to curl, sat tailor-fashion beside her, leaning a little forward. In this position, his breadth of shoulder and the strong, long lines of his body were more evident than usual. Under his thin white coat, pulled tightly across his flat back, one could see the sliding play of muscles.

The day sped, and if either of the two realized what it was that hastened the sun so quickly toward the western horizon, it was not the man. Content to know that this was the one perfect day of his life, Felix did not trouble to search for reasons.

LATE in the afternoon they wandered back toward the inn. As they approached it, the sound of English-speaking voices warned them that a party of ship's officers had ridden up for tea.

"Unless you especially want to stop," Madame Simone suggested, "suppose we go straight around to the stables. I don't feel in the humor just now for a cocktail and the Navy. They're darlings, all of them, and have saved my life here. But after all's said and done, they're as alike as their own buttons, and aside from their jobs, most of them haven't had a new idea since they left the Academy."

The suggestion fitted exactly into Blaine's mood, and together they skirted the house without being seen. Almost at the stables, he stopped. "You go on. I'll join you in a minute. I almost left without paying our hostess the score. I'll be right out."

He found Madame Gerot, paid her, and hurried back to the stables, a series of low mud huts surrounded by a substantial wall. Thérèse, already mounted, sat inside the enclosure, waiting and holding his pony. With a smile he noticed how carefully she was observing the first rule of Haitian horsemanship. The ponies' heads were being held well apart. In Haiti, no one but market women rides anything but a stallion. Once let the vicious little brutes get their heads together, a fight is inevitable.

Blaine was nearly at the corral gate when it happened. Rearing, biting, kicking, three ponies ran out of the stable doors. Two were saddled. The third, a wild-eyed, wicked black with a half-healed scar running along his flank, had not even a rope halter. At the sight of the woman he forgot the other ponies and, squealing, made for her, ears flat, neck outstretched, teeth bared.

"Thérèse!" Blaine shouted warningly, unconsciously using the name, which, long since, he had begun mentally to use. "Thérèse! For God's sake, look out!"

Even as he called, she wheeled her pony, and the killer's teeth missed her leg by inches. "Keep away! I'll manage," she commanded as he ran toward the wall.

The admonition was useless. There was no time for Blaine, or any one else, to aid her. Rearing, striking out wickedly with their razor-sharp forefeet, the five ponies fought, squealing their rage. In half a minute it was over. Somehow, it seemed even while her pony was rearing straight up, she managed to turn him toward the wall. The wall was high. Felix held his breath, powerless to help. A savage blow with her crop, deep-dug spurs, and the pony was over, the four raging, kicking devils inside. But for a half-minute of time, the world had stood still for Blaine, and he realized that, for him, the world was the woman who, with iron self-control, had saved herself out of that mêlée of slashing, sharp hoofs and snapping yellow teeth. The realization brought with it no surprise. He seemed to have known it always.

Officers from the porch, Madame Gerot and the servants were hurrying toward them. Thérèse, ignoring them and the fighting ponies inside, turned furiously on a stableboy who had slipped quietly from the stalls from which the loosened ponies had come and, as unobtrusively as possible, was trying to creep away. Reluctantly obedient, he came and stood beside her pony. Blaine could not understand what she said, but the cold venom of her tone amazed him. Cringing, trying to explain, the boy answered her questions, so terrified that he could scarcely force the words from his lips. Three Blaine caught: *tranger*, *blanc* and *papaloi*. But they were all.

The others arrived and surrounded Madame Simone. Seizing the opportunity, the boy slipped away. Thérèse, apparently all laughing unconcern, answered their questions.

"It was nothing. I saw the ponies were about to fight, so jumped mine over the wall and got out. Seems lucky I did, too. They're at it in earnest, aren't they?" she said, turning attention from herself to the fighting animals in the corral and the half-dozen stableboys who, with no great success, were trying to part them. Blaine alone saw her surreptitiously rub her knee.

"Did one of them get you?" he demanded in a concerned undertone.

"Yes, luckily only a glancing blow. I hardly felt it. Looked ugly in there at first, didn't it? I was really frightened for a minute. That black pony already has one killing to his credit. If Beppo had refused the wall— But you didn't, did you, old man?" she added, patting the neck of the trembling pony.

"My God, you've got nerve!" said Blaine.

The ponies were finally parted, and the officers who had come out to the corral asked if they might join Felix and Thérèse in the ride to town.

"Of course. Come on," she agreed. "And it's time we were starting if Mr. Blaine is to be in time for a dinner engagement which he tells me he has at the British Legation tonight. It is tonight you're dining with the Crewes, isn't it?"

Blaine nodded as he mounted his pony. "Yes, tonight at eight."

On the way down he had small opportunity to speak to Thérèse, but he did manage to get a few minutes with her alone.

"*Tranger* in the dialect means foreigner, doesn't it?" he asked.

"Yes, *tranger* and *blanc* both mean foreigner, white man, either one."

"And *papaloi:* what does that mean?"

Madame Simone looked at him curiously before answering. "Voodoo high priest," she said slowly.

"YOU poor dear! Why didn't you let me know that you were hurt? And you've been lying here all day without a soul to talk to. Why didn't you send for me?" Julia Ashton, dressed for a dance aboard the *Texylvania*, demanded solicitously as she bustled into the cool dim-lit room.

Thérèse Simone lay stretched out in a chaise-longue beside a low table on which rested an open book, face down, an ash tray littered with half-smoked cigarettes, and a bowl of flowers. The room was unlighted except for a tall lacquer lamp placed so as to throw its light on the book she had been reading when Julia came in.

Smiling, she stretched out her hand to her visitor. "Send for you and have you rush up here through the heat, to find nothing worse with me than a bruised knee? Besides, as you know, I really don't mind being alone."

"That's just why I threw on my clothes and came the minute I got an answer to my note. You've no business being alone so much. It's not good for you," Mrs. Ashton replied, her tone affectionately harsh. "I've even my doubts about the knee. Let me see it. As likely as not it's only an excuse to keep from going out to the ship."

Madame Simone shook her head. "No, I really want to go tonight. And now Ida tells me that she thinks I'll be able to do so. She has been rubbing my knee with some concoction of her own, and it really is beginning to feel better."

"Ida!" Mrs. Ashton repeated contemptuously. "Why didn't you do the sensible thing and send out to the ship for Dr. Watts instead of trusting in her? Just because she happens to be your old nurse is no reason to let her experiment on your knee with her herb-and-bark concoctions. I think I'll send for Dr. Watts myself."

"Don't be absurd, Julia. I've already done all the usual things that doctors prescribe for bruises; that's all this is; nothing broken. Now sit here and talk to me. Ida made me promise not to move until she came back."

THE words were scarcely uttered before the door opened to admit a wizened old woman, her wrinkled black face as ageless as an idol's. Her keen, shifting black eyes rested on Mrs. Ashton for a moment without a trace of expression. Her lips parted in a mirthless grin of greeting. "*Bon soir*, Madame Ashton," she mumbled, and hurried over to her patient, for whom her doglike affection was patent. Expression came into her eyes when they rested on the woman stretched out on the couch, and it was evident that to Ida, Thérèse Simone was still a child, to be crooned over and protected.

The gnarled hands removed the bandages with infinite care. The black fingers developed unlooked-for tenderness as they touched the bruised, discolored skin. She nodded her head several times approvingly, making a sort of pleased, clucking noise as she did so. "Now try to walk," she suggested.

Madame Simone got up and put her foot gingerly to the floor. Then, with more confidence, she put her weight upon it. "You're wonderful, Ida!" she exclaimed. "I'd never know that anything had ever been wrong with it. Now, thanks to you, I can go to the dance."

Beaming with pleasure at her mistress's praise, the old woman left them.

"How long is it before we should start?" Thérèse inquired. "But it doesn't matter. I can be ready in a few minutes. I am now, for that matter, all but doing my hair and slipping into my dress."

In Madame Simone's bedroom, Julia Ashton idly watched Thérèse, who sat before a dressing table arranging her hair.

"Why didn't you tell me that Felix Blaine had decided not to sail tomorrow?"

MADAME SIMONE whirled about and faced her guest. Her hair, forgotten, tumbled loose about her shoulders. "What is that? Felix Blaine not sailing tomorrow? Who said so?"

"He did. At the Crewes dinner last night."

Mrs. Ashton was startled, almost frightened, at the expression which came into Thérèse Simone's eyes. Panic, it was—nothing short of it. Every drop of blood seemed drained from her face. Even her lips were white. What it was that she saw in imagination, Mrs. Ashton could not even guess. But there could be no doubt that it was horrible. "He must go, he must." Half a dozen times she repeated the words, her tone absolute despair.

Then she seemed to remember that she was not alone, and turned appealingly to her companion. "Julia, help me, will you? Help me to persuade him to go. Oh, he must! He doesn't understand. But he'll go if I ask it. Tell me that you think he will, Julia!"

Mrs. Ashton could think of nothing which seemed to her less likely. Never before had she seen Thérèse Simone shaken from her perfect calm. Now she was on the verge of hysteria.

"But, Thérèse, my dear, I'm sure that it's on your account that he's staying. Surely that's as plain to you as it it is to every one else," she ventured, seeking a solution of this sudden mood. "And I thought that you liked him, certainly enough to be glad for him to stay on for a week or two longer."

"I do like him—more than I even want to admit to myself," Thérèse whispered miserably. "That's the reason. Oh, I know what I'm saying sounds mad to you! But I can't explain to you, or to anybody."

Something in her eyes dragged Julia Ashton to her feet, and in a second her arms were about the other woman. "You poor darling! Whatever it is,.count on me. In any way I can, I'll help you."

Thérèse tried to smile. "The only thing that you, or any one, can do to help me is to get Felix to leave tomorrow. Julia, Julia, he must go! If he doesn't—" She drew a deep, long breath and her clenched hands relaxed. "Oh, well, we'll see," she said with attempted lightness. She looked at Mrs. Ashton and patted her arm affectionately. "And you're a darling, Julia." This time she managed her smile quite successfully.

An hour later they were on the *Texylvania's* quarter-deck and Mrs. Ashton could hardly believe that the sparkling, brilliant creature, all laughter and careless gaiety, who whirled past her with an ever-changing succession of partners, could be the same woman who had sat staring at some grotesque horror of her imagination and tonelessly repeating, "He must go—he must."

Blaine, too, had eyes for no one else. It was the first time he had seen Thérèse since the evening before, when they rode down from the hills. All day he had debated whether or not he should join the inevitable afternoon party on her porch, and had decided against it. This question, since his decision not to sail on the following day, had become all-important. For this decision, unconsciously made at the same moment that the certainty of his love for her had changed his whole world, was a thing to be told only when they were alone together; he was sure that she would understand its portent.

Importunate officers, begging for dances, made even a minute alone together aboard an impossibility, so he hit upon another plan. "I wonder if you'll take pity on me and give me a lift to my hotel after the party?" he asked during supper on deck. "Like an idiot, I forgot to tell the driver from the hotel to come back for me."

A half-hour later, Blaine and Madame Simone were being driven through the quiet streets by her sleepy native driver. For a while they were both silent. It was Thérèse who spoke first.

"I hope that idiot driver from the hotel won't wait at the pier all night for you. He's quite capable of any stupidity, I imagine."

"Then you saw him. Why didn't you say something about it?"

"Isn't the answer obvious?"

BLAINE thrilled. She, as well as he, wanted this drive alone. That made it much easier to tell her of his decision. "You don't know how glad I am. I've a very particular reason for wanting to talk to you alone."

"Yes?"

"To tell you that I'm not going to sail tomorrow."

"I knew that this afternoon. Julia told me, and there's something I want to ask you to do."

Blaine leaned toward her, smiling eagerly. "What is it?"

"I want you to sail tomorrow."

If she had struck him across the face, Blaine would have been no more surprised. "You want me to sail tomorrow?" He repeated the words very slowly, as if he found difficulty in understanding them.

Thérèse nodded her head without speaking.

"And you know my real reason for staying?" he inquired stupidly.

"Yes. I'm afraid I do. It's because I'm here," Thérèse answered without coquetry and with no pretense of ignorance. "That's why I'm asking you to go." She laid her hand lightly on his arm. "If I'd realized, I'd never have let it happen. But I didn't—not until yesterday. Go tomorrow, please. It's the easiest way, and the only possible one—for both of us."

Miserable, Blaine listened to her words. There was but one construction that he could put upon them. What a fool he had been to expect anything else! Because she had been civil to him, he had jumped to the conclusion that she cared. And he, fool, had let her see that this was what he thought. How she must have laughed at his egotistic presumption! No, she hadn't laughed, she was not the woman to do that. She was trying to make it easier for him by sending him away before he made an even bigger fool of himself. There was nothing to do but play the game as she directed. To remain on the island now was impossible. Far better to go away at once, and to try, as best he could, to forget his hurt.

"If you want me to go, it's settled. I sail tomorrow. And now I'm going to say good-by. You know, I've let myself build on a lot of very foolish hopes, the greatest one that some day you might care as I do—"

He held out his hand, and for a minute, while hers lay in his, he felt an almost overmastering impulse to crush her in his arms and force her to listen to the words which crowded his thoughts. A perverse devil of his brain whispered that she wanted to hear them—that she wanted him to stay. With determination he held on to his self-control. With a quickly repeated, muffled good-by, he stepped out of the carriage and, bareheaded, stood in the roadway and watched her until she passed out of sight in the darkness.

"IS THAT you, Thérèse?" Julia Ashton called from inside as the carriage drove up to the door. "I've invited myself to stay overnight," she announced as her hostess joined her. "I was afraid your knee would rebel at all the dancing."

That Thérèse realized that this was not her reason, Julia knew quite well. But one excuse served as well as another to cloak the determination not to leave her alone.

"How is it now? Does it hurt?"

"I beg your pardon. What did you say?" Thérèse apologized. As she walked about the room her hands were never idle, straightening a flower, moving a book a fraction of an inch, always nervously busy with something.

Mrs. Ashton repeated her question.

"Oh, my knee! I'd quite forgotten I had one. No, it's all right, thanks. Doesn't hurt at all." Her lips smiled, but there the smile ended. The terror of the afternoon was gone from the eyes, giving place to a hopeless, puzzled misery.

Abruptly she turned to the piano. For a moment her fingers poised above the keys. Then the room rang with the gay melody of a Viennese waltz. A ghost of the refrain drifted from her lips until the voice broke with something like a sob. But the music went relentlessly on. Unfaltering, the flashing fingers kept to their task.

Uneasy, Julia sat listening, her eyes never leaving the set face of the woman whose eyes were tragic with the misery of unshed tears. It was awful, gruesome. "Stop!" she begged. "I can't stand it."

Halfway through a bar the music ended, and Thérèse rose from the piano and walked to the open door, where she stood looking out into the night.

"He's going tomorrow," she said, her back still turned.

"Well, you've got your wish. I must say, though, that I didn't think Felix Blaine was the sort of man who would let himself be frightened off," Julia answered, determined somehow to break through this nerve-racking calm.

Instantly Thérèse whirled around. "He wasn't afraid. He's going because he thinks—" she began passionately. Then she checked her words and a slow smile, the first real one in hours, played around her mouth. "I behaved just as you thought I would, didn't I?" she said. Without waiting for a reply, she crossed swiftly to Mrs. Ashton and dropped down, half kneeling, on the floor beside her chair. "He thinks I'm sending him away because I don't care," she whispered without looking up. "If only I could tell him—but I can't! If I had even let him guess, he'd never go. Nothing could drive him away."

Julia Ashton slipped her arm around the woman beside her, drew her head against her shoulder, and waited for her to go on.

"I couldn't bear to look at his face. If I had, I couldn't have gone through with it. He was so puzzled—and hurt. If there were only some other way, so that he could know—but there isn't."

"What is it, dear? Can't you tell me? Surely I'd understand."

"I don't believe you would. And even if you did, it could do no good. It's hopeless, and fantastic, and—and— Oh, Julia, Julia! He's going tomorrow, thinking I don't care. I can't stand it!"

Thérèse jumped to her feet and walked swiftly out of the room. A minute later there came the sound of her bedroom door closing.

For a long time Julia Ashton sat thinking. From time to time she walked softly to the hall and looked across at Thérèse's door, each time hoping not to see the line of light beneath it, and each time disappointed. It was daylight before she went to her own room, but in those hours she had come to her decision. Beneath all her sophistication, Julia Ashton was as sentimental as a man.

AT BREAKFAST Thérèse seemed to be entirely her usual self, and no one, seeing her, would have guessed that she had passed the night pacing up and down her room. "His ship is in," was her only allusion to what had transpired the night before.

To Julia Ashton, her self-control seemed uncanny. Breakfast over, Thérèse made an excuse of letters to be got ready to send down for the outgoing post and shut herself in her room, staying until the sound of wheels on the driveway brought her out on the porch just in time to see Mrs. Ashton drive away.

"Where are you off to so early?" she called.

"To find that idiot, Felix Blaine."

"Julia, Julia! Come back! You mustn't. You don't know what you're doing. If you do I'll—" The rest of the words were lost in the rattle of the flying wheels, as Mrs. Ashton whirled out of the gate on her way to put her overnight decision into execution.

She learned that Blaine already had gone aboard the *Prinz Wilhelm:* there she found him slumped in a chair in the deserted, ovenlike smoking-room.

"Well, at last I've run you down," Julia said from the doorway, where she stood vigorously wielding her ever-present palm-leaf fan. "And if I die of apoplexy, you're to blame. Order me a drink of something cold at once, and don't sit there like a great stupid, staring as if you expected me to explode. Show some human curiosity and ask me why I'm here—for I assure you it's not to kiss you good-by."

"What's your other reason?" Blaine demanded, jumping to his feet.

Julia Ashton's answer was unmistakably serious. "To try to persuade you not to do a thing you'll always regret. I want you to give up the idea of sailing and come ashore with me. And we'll have to hurry if you're to get your things put off," she advised practically. "They said when I came up the gangway that they were sailing within the half-hour."

Blaine made no move to go. "No. Although I'd like to do so more than anything in the world, as things are there's every reason for my staying where I am."

"Idiot!" Mrs. Ashton stamped her foot in annoyance. "Do you suppose that unless I knew all about your reasons for going I'd come racing after you? I'm not a fool. Last night, after she came home from the dance, Thérèse told me that she had sent you away." She paused to let her words sink in. "Because you're a man, and in love, you can see as far as the end of your nose, and no farther. You've assumed that there can be only one reason for sending you away."

"But what other reason—" Felix commenced.

"Merciful God!" Mrs. Ashton exploded, exasperated beyond all endurance. "Are you going to stand here and argue until the ship sails with both of us? I've no desire to set out on a five-day cruise with you—nor self-possession enough to be able to talk coherently with that whistle warning me to get off. So listen and try to understand." Her tone implied a grave doubt of his ability to do so. "I've just left Thérèse; was at her house all night. Women who send men away because they don't care and want to be rid of them, spend their nights sleeping, not walking the floor. There! That's all I intend telling you. Go ashore or not as you please. I'm going now, before I have to swim for it."

She hurried out. Blaine, shouting to a steward to bring his bags from his cabin, followed her. They were just in time. Sailors already were beginning to draw up the gangway and Blaine's bags were thrown over the rail to the pier just as the ship cleared.

During their ride through the town to

Julia's house they were both silent. Julia was beginning to be a little frightened at what she had done, and Blaine felt dazed at the suddenness with which he had been lifted from the wretchedness of the last twelve hours. He hardly dared hope that Mrs. Ashton was right in believing that Thérèse's reason for sending him away was a different one from that of his conviction. But he was here; he would see her again. That much was delightfully certain.

"Now sit down and I'll tell you why I've taken a hand in your affairs," Julia explained as the two went into the darkened living-room of her little villa. "But whether Thérèse will ever speak to me again, is something I can't tell you. It's quite likely that she won't. More than any one I know, she resents any prying into her affairs. I've done worse; I've tried to manage them." She shrugged. "But I had to," she defended. "I couldn't stand it."

For the next half-hour Blaine listened while Mrs. Ashton told him of her conversation with Thérèse before the dance, and a good deal of what transpired afterward. "There it is," she said in conclusion. "That's my justification for taking matters in my own hands and dragging you off the boat."

"And I'll never be able to repay you. Never! If Thérèse cares, nothing else counts," Blaine answered earnestly. "But what is it? Why was Thérèse so determined for me to sail?"

"Don't ask me. As I've told you before, there's undoubtedly some mystery in her life. What it is, I haven't an idea. As well as Thérèse and I know each other, she has never given me even an intimation."

"And so far as I can see, the only way we will ever find out is for her to tell us."

"If she will," Julia commented skeptically.

"Anyway, I'm going up to see her now and let her know that I've broken my promise to leave," Blaine decided.

"I'll go with you and stop just for a minute. I want to know if I'm forgiven."

"THÉRÈSE," Mrs. Ashton called out from her seat in the trap, as they drew up before Madame Simone's door. "Thérèse!" There was no reply and Julia looked at Blaine with a grimace. "I'm afraid that she's even angrier than I anticipated. Wait while I go inside and see."

Blaine caught her expression of surprise when she tried the front door and found it locked. She knocked long and loudly, but there was no response. Reluctantly, she came back to Blaine. "I can't get in," she confessed. "I'm going around to the back and find one of the servants."

"Get out and come here," she called a minute later from the corner of the house.

"What's the trouble?" Felix inquired as he hurried to join her.

"There isn't a soul here. The house is shut up. Let's have a look at the stables and see whether she's riding or driving. But I don't understand about the servants. They should be here."

Arriving at the stables, they stood and regarded a row of empty stalls with amazement, then turned to stare blankly at each other, each waiting for the other to speak. The house was closed, the stables empty. So far as appearances went, the place might have been tenantless for months.

"What can it mean? Every one's gone."

"It means that I've been paid for being a meddling old fool. Whatever her reason is, Thérèse has chosen to disappear rather than see you again. That's the only explanation I can offer. Let's see if we can get into the house. Possibly we may find a clue there."

After several unsuccessful attempts, Felix found a shutter which he could open. "I've managed it," he called out to Mrs. Ashton. "Come, let's go inside."

Together they went through the various rooms. Nowhere was there anything which seemed to indicate either a hurried departure or the intention of an immediate return. Madame Simone and all her servants seemed simply to have walked out of the house and disappeared.

Once more outside, the two stood silently staring at each other. The empty house loomed ominously above them. Already, Blaine fancied, the garden had begun to assume an air of desertion. In a week's time the rank, tropical vegetation would overrun carefully tended pathways and orderly flower beds, turning the place into a jungle.

A peacock, the only living thing which had been left behind, screamed raucously. Julia Ashton started violently. "Let's go," she said quickly, with an undisguised shudder. "This place gives me the creeps, and there's nothing to be gained by staying longer."

Blaine was forced to agree. As completely as if she had dropped into the earth, Thérèse Simone had disappeared, leaving behind her not even the suggestion of a clue as to her whereabouts.

TEN interminable days of midsummer sunshine had elapsed since Thérèse Simone's disappearance.

Every day, despite the handicap of his meager knowledge of patois and of island trails, Blaine was in the saddle from sunrise until night. Market women, coming down from the hills, men loitering before mud huts, bush children—half frightened, half curious at their first sight of a white man—all were questioned. The answer was always the same. None of them had seen a white woman anywhere back in the hills.

The resources of civilization had proven to be equally useless. Telegrams to consular officers and wireless messages from the *Texylvania* to the two or three destroyers in various island ports had all brought the same monotonous reply. Nothing had been seen or heard of Madame Simone anywhere along the coast. Only one thing was certain: she had not left the island.

His friends' prophecies of fever and sunstroke, Felix smiled at and ignored. But now, after ten days without even the faintest clue, he was almost ready to admit himself beaten.

Every night, on his return to Port au Prince, he stopped with Mrs. Ashton, whose anxiety was scarcely less than his own. Sitting on her porch they reviewed, over and over again, their tantalizingly meager knowledge.

"I've almost given up hope of finding her, Julia," Blaine confessed despondently. It was Felix and Julia now. Their common anxiety had drawn them together. "And you're right about one thing. The natives do know where she is; I'm sure of it. But damn it all, they won't tell! I've tried everything—bribery, strategy, intimidation—all with no semblance of result."

Julia looked at him pityingly. The last ten days had changed him almost incredibly. Years, instead of days, might have passed since he and she stood outside Thérèse's empty house. "I hate to say it, Felix, but there seems to be but one thing left to do."

"Do you mean that I must go away—leave the island?"

Mrs. Ashton nodded. "Yes. If your remaining has frightened her into running away she'll stay hidden until you leave. That is the one thing that will bring her back, if anything will."

"If anything will," Blaine repeated anxiously. "What do you mean?"

Julia drew her hand wearily across her eyes. "I don't know. But I'm frightened. It's all so mysterious and creepy. Here we are, a handful of unwanted whites living among a million people about whom we really know nothing, and never will. What is there in the wild country back from the coast, where Thérèse must be hiding? What happens there? There isn't a single white person who knows. The one thing that gives me the least bit of comfort is that Ida must be hiding her away, as she did once before."

"When? This is the first I've heard of that."

"Of course you've heard it. I mean when she went away, just after her husband was killed."

"I've never heard any of the details of all that. Tell me about it."

"It seems that Georges Simone met her in Europe, fell in love with her, and followed her here to Haiti. After a little, they were married in the mission chapel at Pétionville and after the ceremony came down here to sail for Europe that afternoon. About an hour before sailing time, Simone was discovered dead in the garden, his head split open by a machete. Apparently Thérèse did nothing to discover who committed the crime, but instead, disappeared herself for three months. Old Ida disappeared and returned with her."

"Have you ever said anything to Thérèse about it?"

"Yes, once. You see it all happened long before I came here, but the women in Port au Prince said such terrible things that one day I said to her that I had always wondered why she never made any attempt to discover the murderer; for, of course, the Haitian authorities did nothing."

"And what did she say?"

Julia smiled. "Her answer wasn't very

illuminating. I remember it, word for word. It was: 'Because it wasn't a person who killed him. It was a thing.' "

"What the devil could she have meant?"

Mrs. Ashton shrugged expressively. "God knows. I haven't an idea."

BEFORE they could talk more, three or four of the *Texylvania's* officers rode in to bring the news that their ship was sailing the following day, and to say good-by. Julia Ashton was regretful and indignant.

"Of all the times to order the ship away! They are fools in Washington. The natives are itching to begin a new revolution. With that watchdog out of the harbor, they'll be at it within a week, mark my words," she vehemently prophesied, and Blaine knew that her vehemence was fathered by her thought of Thérèse, alone somewhere in the bush.

It was long after Julia's other guests had left when Blaine rode off to his hotel and to bed. As he was walking down the porch, Larsen called out to him: "Mr. Blaine, would you mind coming into the bar here for a minute?"

"What is it?"

"Do you think this is genuine?"

Blaine took the slip of paper which the proprietor held out to him. It was a check for five hundred dollars, signed by Thérèse Simone.

Felix stared at it in blank astonishment. "Where did you get it?"

"He gave it to me just now as security for a hundred I advanced him. The captain, I mean," Larsen answered, pointing to a group seated at a table just outside the other bar door. Enright and half a dozen other men of his sort were absorbed in a poker game. The Englishman, evidently, was very drunk.

Blaine's brain raced madly. Here, at last, was a clue. Enright, the man who had left civilization to live with the natives, had returned from the bush with a check of Thérèse's. Why he had it, Felix did not stop to consider. It was enough that he had it, for that meant that he must know something of her whereabouts. How much, he intended to find out.

"Is it her signature?"

"I think it is." Then the proprietor's evident uneasiness gave him an idea. "Of course I can't be positive, but I'll make you a proposition. Frankly, I don't like the idea of a check of any woman who is a friend of mine being in the possession of any of that crew out there. Give it to me and I'll give you one of mine and take the risk that the other is good."

Larsen hesitated. "The captain was very particular to say that this was security only, and that nobody was to see it."

"That makes its genuineness seem a little more doubtful, don't you think?" Blaine suggested cannily.

For five minutes more they talked, and when Felix went to his room he carried Thérèse's check with him and also Larsen's promise not to let Enright leave the hotel without his knowledge. "There's no chance of his going tonight," the proprietor assured him. "He's too drunk."

IT WAS almost day when the captain stumbled into Blaine's room. "I've come for my check," he announced, drunkenly surly.

"Sit down. I want to talk to you." Blaine ordered sharply, as he got quickly out of bed.

The Englishman did not move from his place in the doorway. "I want my check." he repeated.

"Well, you won't get it; not until you tell me how it came into your possession."

"And who the hell's going to make me tell?"

"I am."

Enright laughed mirthlessly. "Try it and see how far you'll get."

Something of the gentleman the Englishman once had been crept into the defiant words. Luckily for the success of his undertaking, Blaine caught it.

"Look here," he said in the tone that a man uses to an equal. "Possibly you know, possibly you don't, but for days and days I've been searching for Madame Simone. The check interests me as a clue. I want you to help me to find her."

"I haven't said I know where she is. Just because I happen to have a check of hers is no proof," Enright answered cautiously.

"No, it isn't. But you do know something, don't you?"

"Maybe I do, maybe not. Oh, hell! I'm too drunk and sleepy now to talk. Tomorrow, maybe."

Unsteadily he pushed open the door and

went outside. Almost at once the door of the next room slammed and a key grated in the lock. In a few minutes, loud snores proclaimed that the captain was sleeping.

Blaine was too excited to think of going back to bed. With the coming of day, he slipped on his dressing-gown and went out to the swimming-pool in the garden. For half an hour he swam about; he was on the point of getting out when a shadow in the doorway of the enclosure made him look up quickly. Amazed, he saw that it was the Englishman. From the snores he had heard from the captain's room as he passed coming down, he had concluded that he would be asleep for hours.

With a surly "Good morning," Enright took off his dirty clothes, in which evidently he had been sleeping, and dived into the pool. It was a beautiful dive, scarcely disturbing the surface of the water, which Felix had precipitously quit at the newcomer's arrival.

As the Englishman swam lazily about, his eyes passed slowly, appraisingly, over Blaine's naked body and muscular, straight legs. "You'd never believe it," he began unexpectedly, "but five years ago I was better built than you are now. Not so much beef, but better muscled. Look what this damn country has done for me! Bones and nothing else. Damn the bloody island! I hate it worse than hell." The man's tone was vehemently rebellious.

Blaine knew that this was his moment. In this mood, Enright might listen.

"If you hate the island, why don't you get out?"

Enright climbed to a seat beside Felix and sat for a minute looking hard at him before he answered. "Can't. Haven't got the money. It takes too much."

"Possibly we can make a bargain. If you can help me with what we were talking of last night, I'm willing to pay, and pay well."

ENRIGHT jumped to his feet and hurried to the door. He peered out furtively. "Never know who's around listening in this damn place," he explained as he returned.

"How about it?" Felix demanded, resuming their talk. "Do you know where Madame Simone is?"

Enright's face became crafty. "Suppose I do. How much would it be worth to you if I'd show you where she is?"

"Name your price."

The Englishman considered. "Would it be worth a thousand quid?"

Even had Blaine possessed no more than a tenth of the fortune that was his, he would not have hesitated. "It's a bargain," he said.

"Not so fast. There isn't enough money in this island to pay me to take you if I thought anybody would know. You'll have to agree to do just as I direct, and say not one word to anybody, or I'm out of it."

"What am I to do?"

For a moment, Enright sat thinking. "Ride up to Pétionville this morning and tell Larsen you're going to stop for a night or two at the old Frenchwoman's place up there. Leave there after sunset tonight and I'll meet you at the halfway turn on the road down. Tell Madame Gerot that you're coming back here. Then nobody will be wondering where you are. And not a word. If anybody suspects, we'll never find her. She'll be warned and I'll—well, I'll snuff out before this cough gets me."

"But why? What's it all about?"

"Never mind what it's all about. You're paying me to take you to Madame Simone, aren't you? I didn't bargain for any more. Ask her when you find her."

Enright's tone made it plain that he had no intention of talking more, and Blaine was too excited over his good fortune to cavil. It was enough that at last there seemed to be a possibility of finding Thérèse. Strangely enough, it never occurred to him to question Enright's honesty. For the moment, the gentleman the Englishman once had been had looked out through the mask of the remittance man.

"I'll be at our meeting-place at eight," Blaine said, and hurried into the hotel to dress and start. For the first time since Thérèse had disappeared, he whistled as he dressed.

The day at Pétionville seemed endless, and Madame Gerot's uneasy predictions of revolution, now that the *Texylvania* had sailed, did nothing to speed it.

Adhering strictly to his instructions, he waited until after sunset. Then he rode away, his brain filled with uneasy misgivings. It grew rapidly darker and before he reached the appointed meeting-place he could scarcely see across the narrow road. In a frenzy of uncertainty, he awaited the hour of Enright's arrival, and had almost concluded that he was not coming, when he heard a pony approaching over the rock-strewn roadway. He drew back deeper in the shadows until he could be sure who it was. A moment later, the Englishman's lank form emerged from the blackness.

"Here I am," Felix said, stepping out into the road.

"Sh! It's early. No telling who's around," Enright cautioned. "Don't talk; follow me."

For an hour they climbed steadily upward, along a trail no more than a path through the dense, tangled undergrowth. Unfamiliar, eery sounds of the tropical night came from the bush, mingled with muffled beating of distant tom-toms.

Finally the Englishman dismounted. "We'd better give our ponies a rest. From here on the climbing is pretty steep and we've got to get to the end of our journey before daylight."

"Why?"

"I told you once that if we were seen, you'd never find her," Enright answered impatiently. "She'd be warned, just as she was of all that useless trail-riding you've been doing."

"So you know about that?"

"Of course. Every one in the bush knew. You were never out of sight of some watcher hidden beside the trail. Everywhere you went, your coming was signaled on ahead. But come, there's no time to talk of that now. We'd better go on."

ENRIGHT had not overstated facts when he said the trail would be worse. Soon it ceased to be a trail at all, and for an hour the ponies stumbled up the dry bed of a stream, over ledges and around boulders. This stretch passed, they began to climb again. How long he had been riding, Blaine had no idea. It seemed hours. He could see nothing but the walls of foliage which brushed him on either side and a strip of star-studded sky overhead. The air became perceptibly cooler. In another half-hour he realized that he was cold. Finally Enright stopped and beckoned to him. Just ahead he saw the shadowy outline of a palm-thatched hut.

"Here we are; and before daylight, thank God!" he said quietly.

"Is she there, inside the hut?"

"No, she's somewhere farther on ahead. Exactly where, I don't know. But late every afternoon she rides along this trail. Take your pony inside the hut so that he can't be seen when day comes, and keep out of sight yourself. Wait, and in the afternoon she will surely pass this way. She always does. I can't go any farther. I don't dare. The rest is up to you. And you'd better get the pony inside right away. Day can't be far off."

Blaine dismounted and before he led the pony away, put an envelope into Enright's hands. "There's my end of our bargain."

"Thanks." Enright's voice was strangely gruff. "But how do you know I'm not double-crossing you?"

"I'll chance it. I don't make mistakes in people often," he answered as he led his pony into the dark hut.

A moment later he was back in the doorway, a question on his lips, but the Englishman already was gone. Far down the trail over which they had come, the hoofbeats of a pony grew faint and then died out altogether.

Felix stood and listened until the last whispering echo died away. The overpowering depression of absolute aloneness gripped him. The surrounding thick blackness which walled him in became endowed with a personality, menacing and ominous. A gust of cold wind cut through his thin coat. Chilled, he turned and entered the hut, and after carefully closing the door which sagged on rotting leather hinges, struck a match. Beady little eyes peered down from the cobwebbed rafters overhead. Along the top of the mud walls and in dim corners, others reflected the faint flare. There was the soft swishing of scuttling furry bodies, and the eyes disappeared.

Blaine looked keenly about. Evidently the hut had long been deserted. Except for a bunk, a rude bench and a broken earthenware jug, it was quite bare. The match scorched his fingers, dropped to the floor and went out. With the darkness again came the squeaking and soft patter of the rats. Shivering, he fumbled about until he found the door. Jerking it open, he went outside and, seating himself with his back against a stunted tree, prepared to await the coming of the day, the day which he believed would prove to be the most momentous of his life.

The first glimmer of dawn snuffed out the low-hung stars, and Blaine hurried inside to await the sunrise, which came with tropical suddenness.

He went over to one of the small, square openings that served as windows and peered out. What he saw was not illuminating. As he had already guessed, he was very high. The hut was built on the crest of a long, curving range of hills, but there was nothing which permitted him to estimate, even roughly, how far inland he was or his whereabouts on the island. An overgrown trail, the trail over which Thérèse would come, wound along the summit of the trail and passed just before the door of the hut.

He turned from the window and stretched himself full length on the bench. His eyes fell on the broken water jug and he realized what tortures of thirst he would suffer before the afternoon. But he did not dare go outside in search of a spring. Enright had warned him to remain in hiding and he would take no chances.

After an eternity of waiting and conjecture, he looked at his watch to find that the day was not yet two hours old. If only he had been told of these hours of waiting, he would have come prepared. A book, anything to keep his mind from racing around the squirrel cage of possibilities. What would Thérèse say when they met? Would she again send him away? Would she hate him for ferreting out her hiding-place and forcing her to see him? Or, worse still, would he see Thérèse at all, or was this a mad, fruitless quest? More than all the others, this possibility tormented him. What reason had he for trusting the Englishman? None, yet somehow he did. It was his last chance. If this failed, nothing remained but to give up his quest and leave the island.

By noon, the cabin was a furnace. Not a breath of the vagrant breeze that stirred the leaves outside reached it. Instead it seemed to attract and concentrate the heat. His thirst was terrible. Elbows on knees, his chin resting in his palms, Blaine sat on the broken bench waiting for the sunset, eager, and yet afraid of what it would bring.

THE afternoon dragged on, a misery of uneasy conjecture. With its slow passage, his fears rapidly assumed the proportions of certainties. Of course Thérèse would not come. Every five minutes he went to the window overlooking the trail and looked out. Always he was disappointed. No figure on horseback was riding toward him.

As the sun dropped lower and the temperature became more bearable, a new menace appeared to torment him. He began to notice a mist rising from the valleys below. It was far down at first, but like a rising tide it began to creep up the hillsides, blotting out everything beneath it. Blaine became panicky. If it continued to billow up until it reached the crest, Thérèse might pass a dozen times unseen. The fog became thicker and climbed steadily. One minute a hillside palm would stand out clear and sharply defined. A minute later its tufted top would be swallowed up in the soft grayness.

Everything below him disappeared, and the world became an inverted blue bowl of crystal sunshine resting on a formless billowy cloud. Between the two, the narrow hilltop trail stretched out into the mist, its end, like the rest of the world, lost in the enveloping haze. This, too, would soon disappear. Already the nearest objects were wrapped in a thin, gossamer veil.

Blaine's heart missed a beat, then raced tumultuously. He had seen something moving through the grayness. So wraith-like and ephemeral as to seem a phantom of his imagination, Thérèse Simone emerged from the soft mist and rode toward him down the eery, cloud-edged trail.

After the first second of dazzling, unbelievable joy, fear took possession of Blaine. He was terrified. Now that he knew that, at once, he must speak to her, he hardly dared. What would she say? Would she send him away? Fool! Of course she would. What reason had she ever given him to think otherwise? What had possessed him to hope for any alternative?

Her pony was almost at the hut. Now that the moment had come which would decide all of his future, he felt a craven impulse to temporize, to let her pass. In another second she would ride by and be lost in the fog. He drove himself to the door, and like a criminal going to receive sentence, threw it open and stepped out on the trail before her.

"Thérèse!" Joy and fear and pleading were all in the one word.

Too astonished for speech, Thérèse Simone stared at him in wordless amazement. But no words were necessary. Without an opportunity to mask her emotions, the answer to the one great question was written large in her radiant face. And Felix Blaine, reading it, thrilled with the supreme happiness which, unless he is robbed of his birthright, comes once in his life to every man. In that tense moment he knew that Thérèse Simone loved him. Nothing else mattered.

Without a word he lifted her from her pony, and Beppo wandered over to the edge of the trail, where he alternately nibbled at the sparse grass and looked inquiringly back at them, as if theorizing on the vagaries of human beings.

Blaine, his arms tight about the woman, his voice not quite steady, whispered softly: "Thérèse, sweetheart! At last I've found you! I've found you and am never going to let you go again."

Slowly she lifted her head until her grave eyes, full of happiness, in spite of their seriousness, looked into his.

"I knew you'd come sometime, Felix," she murmured, hesitating almost imperceptibly at the name.

Very softly she lifted her arms and clasped them around his neck. For a long minute they stood motionless. The mist crept up, blotting out the world and leaving them alone in it, a man and a woman, his arms about her, his lips pressed hard on hers.

ALL interest, Blaine looked about the hut to which Thérèse had led him. Primitive and simple as it was, the room into which they had come was, unmistakably, that of a woman, a foreigner. Instead of the usual dirt floor, there was a wooden one, covered by a fiber rug, native-woven and dyed a deep orange.

On the brown, mud walls was an odd miscellany of objects. An enormous, outspread fan of peacock feathers almost covered the space between two of the little orange-curtained windows. Three water jugs, filled with trailing sprays of crimson flowers, hung at intervals, suspended by their leather thongs. In the center of one wall, otherwise bare, a golden-brown ivory crucifix stood out sharply defined against its black velvet background. An earthenware jug, filled with spearlike scarlet flowers, stood on a book-strewn table in the center of the room and glowed warmly in the light of rude lamps, which were really shallow bowls filled with oil, on which were floating crossed sticks supporting wicks of twisted fiber.

Thérèse, leaning beside the fireplace, in which a fire already had been laid against the evening's chill, threw away her cigarette and walked over to the table, as Blaine entered.

"Did you find water for the ponies?"

"Yes, they're all right for the night."

"Then let's have supper. I know you must be starved. What time did you have your breakfast this morning? It must have been very early."

"Very," Blaine repeated, and at something in his intonation, Thérèse looked up quickly.

"How long had you been in that hut before I came along? Honest now!"

"Since before day." Felix's tone held something of the challenge of a small boy when he misdoubts the consequences of a confession.

"You poor man! Why, you must be—" Thérèse began, and stopped midway in her sentence. She looked keenly at Blaine. "Then it wasn't chance that led you to the hut. Some one must have—" Again she stopped and a quizzical smile came into her eyes. "How much did you pay the Englishman?" she asked unexpectedly.

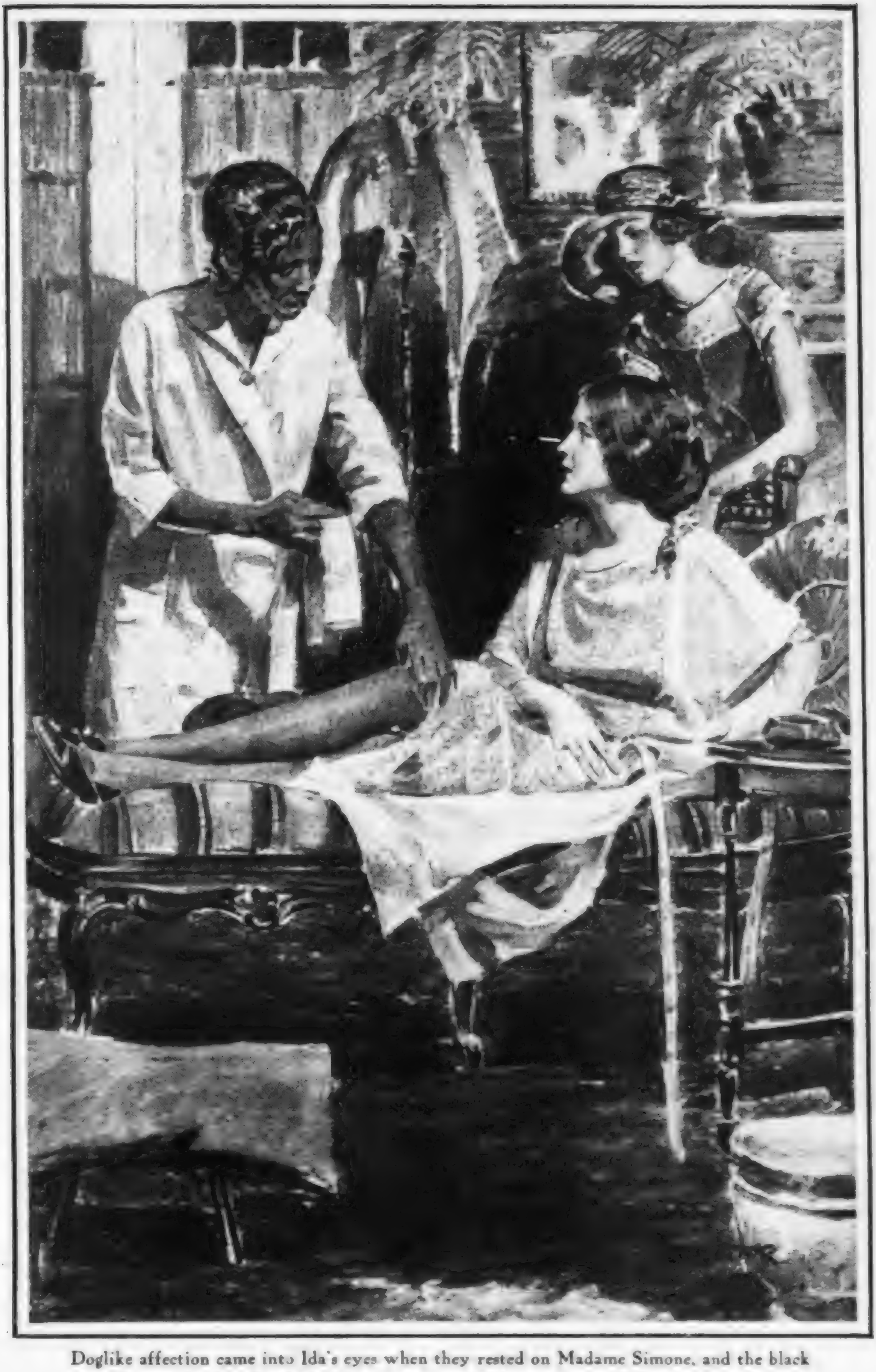
His answer was out before he thought. "Five thousand dollars."

Thérèse threw back her head and began to laugh. "I should have known better than to try to bid against an American. No wonder he told you. I learned that he was going down to Port au Prince and paid him five hundred to keep quiet."

So there was the explanation of the mystery of the check, so simple that Felix could not understand why it had never occurred to him. Were all the other things which puzzled and tormented him as easily explained?

His face must have betrayed the question which was on his lips, for before he spoke, Thérèse leaned across the table toward him. All the laughter had gone out of her eyes and they were very grave and direct.

"Felix, will you do something for me? Will you try to forget, until tomorrow, that there are any questions you want to ask me?



Doglike affection came into Ida's eyes when they rested on Madame Simone, and the black fingers developed unlooked-for tenderness. "Now try to walk," she suggested.

And I don't mean that I want you just to forget to ask them. I want you to forget that there's anything to ask. Can you do it, do you think?"

"I'll try, anyway," he answered gravely.

"Thanks. Tomorrow I'll tell you anything you want to know. But now—" She drew a long breath. "Just for tonight, let's pretend there's nothing to answer or explain. It's all so difficult, and complicated; and tonight I want to be happy and forget it all."

"Why need we ever speak of it again? Why not forget it for always?" Felix questioned. "If you say so, we'll blot out everything which happened before this afternoon when I met you on the trail. But after that, I'll never consent to give up one minute."

"Nor I, not one. But the other— Oh, Felix, if only we could get rid of it so easily! There's nothing I wouldn't do. But there it is, like the old man of the sea."

Blaine looked across at her, his heart in his eyes. "Whatever it is, darling, there are two of us to see it through instead of one."

IDA, who had greeted him on his arrival with a "*Bon soir*, Monsieur Blaine" as imperturbable as if he had dropped in for dinner at Madame Simone's Port au Prince house, came in with their coffee.

"Put it over there by the couch," her mistress directed. "Now a cigarette, and I'll be completely happy," she said, leaning back on the pillows Blaine had arranged for her on the couch.

He doubted this. Already, two or three times, he had caught her quick glance at the windows. What she expected to see, he could not remotely guess. Suddenly, she jumped up, jerked the curtains apart and peered out intently. Then, very carefully, she drew them close together.

"What was it?"

"Nothing," she evaded. "Let's walk outside a bit. The fog has all cleared away, but it's as dark as ink."

"I'm ready," Felix answered, but her evasion had made him no less certain that he, too, had seen eyes peering in through the gap in the drawn curtains.

"You'll not stay here after tonight, will you?" he asked when they were outside the hut. "I can't help seeing that something is frightening you. It makes me sick when I think of all the nights you've spent here alone with old Ida."

"Don't imagine me sitting here alone and terrified. I haven't been one bit, truly— not until tonight."

"But why tonight?" Blaine asked in a tone of indulgent amusement. "Tonight you're not alone. I'm here with you."

Thérèse smiled enigmatically. "That's why I'm frightened," she answered, and added as if to close the subject, "but my reasons can wait, along with other things, until tomorrow."

For a while, his arm about her, they walked in silence through the night. Blaine was too thrillingly conscious of the nearness of the woman beside him to want to break the charmed thread of his thoughts.

Thérèse was the first to speak. Unexpectedly, she looked up at him, a smile on her lips. "It's good of you, Felix, to humor me and not ask me to explain all the things which you've a perfect right to know. It means a good deal more to me than you imagine. I do so want to be happy tonight— And I am," she added after an appreciable moment of hesitation. "I've got a right to happiness for one night, don't you think? One night isn't much to ask for out of such a long, dreary succession of them."

"You mustn't say that," Felix expostulated; and with a happy laugh which held just a shade of troubled uncertainty, he caught her in his arms and held her close. "It sounds as if you're contemplating our future together as a terrible prospect. I can't allow that. To me it's so wonderful that I hardly dare think of it." Her nearness, the perfume of her yielding body, her deep, somber eyes intoxicated him. His arms tightened about her until they held her breathlessly close. He kissed her fragrant hair, her closed lids and then her soft, curving mouth. "If I only knew how to tell you, sweetheart! I love you so. Nothing, nothing shall ever take you away from me again."

Listening to his half-articulate words, Thérèse opened her eyes and smiled into his, her lips responding to his eager kisses.

"I'm glad you found me, Felix," she whispered. "I love you. No matter what comes, remember it, dear. And remember that I tried my best to keep you from knowing it. But I'm glad I failed; I'm glad!"

The last words were defiant; but of what? Once more she lifted her lips to his.

ON THE way back, both were silent, busy with their own thoughts, but twice Blaine saw Thérèse glance back with that furtive quickness. Evidently, whatever it was that she feared to see was not there.

As they entered the hut, Felix was again struck with the incongruity of its interior with the wildness outside. The fire had been lighted. The yellow flames of the primitive lamps lighted up the orange and soft browns of the room. Idly curious to know what books Thérèse had chosen for companions, Blaine strolled over to the center table to glance over them.

"Hello!" he exclaimed. "Where did you get this? I haven't noticed it before."

"What?" Thérèse inquired casually.

Blaine picked up the object which had caught his attention and held it out to her.

It was the dried wing of a giant bat.

Thérèse's only reply was a shuddering, indrawn breath. With no word of explanation she went quickly to the couch and dropped down on it, staring at the thing Felix held in his hand, her eyes wide with growing terror.

He threw the bat's wing angrily on the floor and, hurrying across the room, dropped down beside her. "What is it, darling? What are you afraid of?" he questioned, his arms protectingly about her.

"Hold me tight, Felix, tight! Tell me that it's all a terrible nightmare, that I'll wake up and find I've been dreaming." Her hands clung to him and she buried her head in his shoulder. "Oh, I can't stand it, I can't! If anything happens, Felix, I'll kill myself. I've stood all that I can. Why didn't you go away while you could? Now—oh, God, now perhaps it's too late!"

Blaine was too wise to try to comfort her with words. Instead, he sat quietly, straining her trembling body to his, and murmuring unintelligible, half-spoken nothings, as one does to a child who awakens frightened in the night.

At last she looked up at him with a brave effort at a smile. "I'll try not to act the baby now. I'm sorry I behaved so absurdly. I won't again, I promise you."

Blaine said nothing, his only answer a worshiping smile.

"Felix!" Thérèse's hands caught the lapels of his coat, and her eyes looked straight into his, very direct and heartbreakingly serious. "No matter what happens, what you may think of me later, never forget that I love you absolutely, and that I did everything that I could to keep you from finding it out. You'll never forget that, will you? I did my best to get away from you as soon as I realized how things stood."

"But, my darling, you mustn't talk this way. Remember this: no matter what it is that's worrying you, it can make no difference in my love for you. Nothing can do that."

Thérèse smiled wearily. "You think that, dear, I know. But suppose— Oh, I can't talk about it, and—" She jumped to her feet. "I've got to think hard, and straight. I can't think at all with your arms around me. I want desperately to go ahead and take the risk. And I'm afraid."

"Tell me what it is, and let me try to help you to decide."

"I wish I could, but I mustn't. I know what you would say. No. I must decide for myself."

FELIX sat and watched her as she walked up and down the room. It was plain that she was all nerves, hard though she tried to hide it. At last she threw herself into a chair by the fire and sat staring into the flickering blaze.

Powerless to do anything, Blaine sat and watched her, his thoughts racing in a circle, searching for an answer to what now was an old puzzle. This new thing, the bat's wing, and Thérèse's terror at seeing it, evoked vague, formless misgivings. There was nothing tangible, but the atmosphere of this solitary hut, hidden high in the hills, the silent woman, in a panic at some cryptic meaning in the shriveled wing, her indefinite evasions, the whole situation awoke a creepy uneasiness which he could not throw off.

At last Thérèse looked up from the fire, rose from her chair and came over to him. "Felix, there's one more thing I'm going to ask of you. Will you trust me and let me do it without giving any explanations?"

"I'm making no promises in the dark," he answered with a slow smile. "What is it?"

"I want a little more time to think. Here with you I can't. Will you stay here until tomorrow afternoon, and let me go down without you at sunrise?"

"No, I certainly will not. Now that I've found you, I don't propose ever to let you get out of my sight again." Thérèse could not be certain whether this answer was entirely serious, but she feared that it was. "Do you think, for one minute, that I'm going to allow you to go over that lonely trail alone, and you, right now, frightened half to death? Not a bit of it. When you go, I go with you."

"But you don't understand," Thérèse persisted. "I give you my word that I'm not afraid, and also that I'm absolutely safe—safer than anybody on this island. That's true, honestly. But I must get by myself so that I can think." Her smile had something of her usual self in it when she added: "You're a very disconcerting young man for a woman who happens to be in love with you to have around."

In spite of himself, Blaine was forced to recognize the sincerity of her belief in her own safety. He began to weaken. "And if I consent, when will I see you?"

"Tomorrow night, or the next day. Go straight to your hotel when you get down, and I'll have a note for you there, telling you when to come. And that will be the minute I've reached my decision."

"But, sweetheart," Blaine persisted, "what can there be that requires so much thinking?"

"Look here," Thérèse said very directly. "We both know there is something—a barrier of some sort—between us. I know what it is. You don't. Give me twenty-four hours to decide whether you stay here or sail on the next boat."

"Thérèse! What are you talking about? You're mad. You are going to marry me and we will leave together. You've promised."

Thérèse shook her head. "No, I've never promised you that."

"But you said that you loved me—"

"It's because I love you so much that I may have to send you away. Felix, don't make it any more difficult than it is already. Please, please don't try to go down with me. Let me go alone with Ida. Don't argue it, dear. I tell you, there's absolutely no danger for me."

In spite of himself, her persistence impressed him. His objections became more and more half-hearted. Finally, he gave in. "Yes, I'll admit," he conceded, "you've forgotten more about this island than I'll ever know. And if anything here is involved, you're much the better judge. But you promise me that you'll see me tomorrow night?"

"Or the next day. The minute I make my decision."

"All right, I agree, fool that I am to do so. Now let's forget it."

Thinking it over, after Thérèse had ridden away in the thick darkness which precedes the dawn, taking old Ida with her, Felix found it hard to understand how completely they seemed to have carried out his suggestion. Somehow under the spell of her words and her presence, he forgot to puzzle over the one question on which all their future seemed to hang. Just what they did talk about, he could not remember, but it was of a future all rose and gold. When he contemplated it, the present, with its difficulties and uncertainties, became as hazy and formless as the shadows which wavered around him.

One by one, the flames of the lamps flickered, turned blue and disappeared, until only one was left. Blaine, lying full length on the couch, watched it, and for the first time realized that he was very tired.

His waking thoughts began to mingle with the vague horrors of half-sleep. He drowsed, forced his eyes open, drowsed again. At last, struggling against it, he dropped into a deep, dreamless sleep of exhaustion.

HE AWOKE with a start. It was as black in the hut as when he had dropped asleep. He closed his eyes again. A sudden fear brought him up with a jerk. Had he been asleep for minutes, or for hours? Striking a match, he peered anxiously at his watch. It was ten minutes past nine. He had slept through the entire day and it was night again. Possibly, probably, Thérèse was waiting for him now, wondering what had delayed him.

He hurried out to the corral, threw a saddle on his pony and was out on the trail before he stopped to realize that he had only the vaguest idea of the way back to Port au Prince. But the pony seemed to have no such uncertainty; so he left it to the pony, and gave himself up to imaginings of the morrow. Back in Port au Prince, where her surroundings were more nearly those of civilization, Thérèse would forget the fear, or whatever it was, which she had made him feel was so real while she talked to him in the mountain hut. There, her mysterious terror had not seemed bizarre. Blaine frowned in the darkness. Yes, Haiti did weave an unaccountable spell over those who lingered amid her myriad contradictions. The lazy rustle of the leaves of gray-boled palms, the perfume of gaudy-colored flowers, the sheer beauty of the hills and sky and sea did strange things to one's brain.

The trail steepened precipitously, bringing Blaine abruptly back to his actual surroundings. They had climbed no such place as this, coming up. Of that he was sure. Somewhere, his pony had left the trail. He peered keenly about, learning nothing. In the darkness, the country seemed even wilder than any he had noticed on the upward journey.

A little farther on he became conscious that for some time he had been hearing the beat of tom-toms. So accustomed had he become to the sound on the island that he noticed it no more than a city dweller does the roar of traffic. The darkness about him was brightened by a faint glow and the silence broken by a muffled humming of human voices. For a moment it puzzled him. Then he realized its significance. A native dance was in progress. At a snail's pace he proceeded, searching for a trail of some sort leading toward the light. Some one there could tell him his whereabouts and direct him on his way.

He rode until the light was behind him. Evidently, there was no trail leading in. Dismounting, he tied his pony and, on foot, struck through the thick bush. The flare grew brighter, and for some subconscious reason he began to walk quietly, slipping as noiselessly as he could through the tangle of vines and undergrowth which grew beneath the palms. The noise ahead grew louder: the voices of men and women mingling in a savage chant.

Then, unexpectedly close at hand, he saw it through an opening in the trees. With an involuntary exclamation of amazement, Blaine crouched in the tangled undergrowth and watched. This was no ordinary dance; of that he was sure.

A cleared space, a hundred feet or more across, was just ahead of him. The ground, scuffed by innumerable naked feet, was as bare and hard as stone. To Blaine it looked like a miniature dance hall of the elephants which Kipling's story had made a vivid reality for him as a child. Resinous torches, some stuck in the ground at the edge of the clearing, others fastened to the boles of the encircling palms, cast a thick red glow over the scene. Heavy black smoke hovered overhead, blotting out the stars.

The throb of numerous tom-toms reverberated in the air. Big ones, with their slow, regular beat, small ones which joined them in quicker tempo. Mingling with the two, weaving them together, was the rattling, exciting tattoo of the smallest. The stench of raw tafia and sweating human bodies was heavy in the air.

AMID this glare and stink and sound, macabre figures shuffled in and out in an African ghost dance. Men and women, some half naked, some stark, advanced and retreated to the beat of the drums. All danced singly, grimacing and posturing. It was as if all the lewd bronzes of Pompeii had become alive to dance here with lascivious abandon.

The tempo of the tom-toms changed. The dancers, still continuing to writhe and posture, moved back to the edge of the clearing, where they formed a weaving circle, their sweating bronze bodies gleaming where the red glare of the torches touched swelling muscles and rounded flesh.

A white goat, its frightened eyes glittering, appeared from somewhere and dashed frantically about, seeking to escape from the surrounding circle. The ring narrowed. The goat continued to race around in its frenzy of fear. An old woman, black and wizened, but amazingly quick, stepped from among the crowd. The goat dodged and circled. Relentlessly, the hag followed. As quickly as a snake strikes, her hand shot out, seized it by a horn and dragged it, bleating, to a palm-constructed altar, built on the edge of the clearing farthest away from Blaine's hiding-place. The circle broke and gave way at her approach. The chanting became a delirious wail.

High above the old woman's head a knife

flashed, poised and then plunged swiftly down. An agonized bleat, and the goat, blood spurting with every heartbeat, raced blindly around the remade circle. Its eyes glazed; its legs trembled and crumpled.

Pandemonium. Men and women jostled and fought to be the first to reach it. The mad dance began again; the tom-toms boomed deafeningly; the voices howled insanely.

In the midst of a beat, the tom-toms stopped. The voices became hushed. The dancers dropped back, leaving a cleared aisle from the edge of the bush, straight to the palm altar. Once more the tom-toms set the air quivering. Even to Blaine, with generations of civilization behind him, their call was almost irresistible. Every nerve in his body tingled with desire. Unconsciously his body swayed to their hypnotic beat.

Out of the gloom of the bush appeared a newcomer. Her head was wrapped around with a crimson cloth. A robe of the same color half covered her body, which was painted dead white. At arm's length, on either side of her, she held two gamecocks, one black, the other red. With slow, gliding steps she advanced between the lines of watching men and women, the women envious, the men hot-eyed and slobbering. As if it were held by invisible wires, the figure swayed to the beat of tom-toms. As insidiously as the smoke of opium, the whitened body added its taint to the picture which, until now, had been all savage beastliness. With a slow, undulating glide, it passed between the twin walls of black bodies.

Before the altar, the woman stopped. Her arms went out straight before her, her head bent low. The old black priestess stepped out before her. A knife flashed twice. The cocks' heads dropped to the ground. Slowly, very slowly the painted woman raised her arms and began to turn beneath her crimson fountain. Then more quickly—and Felix stared unbelievingly into the face of Thérèse Simone, a face so intent and distorted that he scarcely recognized it.

STUNNED, his brain a chaos of warring sensations, he crouched in his hiding-place. For a long minute, his reluctant eyes picked out each hideous detail of the nightmare, and seared it indelibly on his brain. Volition returned, and with it one irresistible desire, the desire to get away. Heedless of the trailing vines which wrapped themselves around his legs, of the thick bush which reached up to impede him, he plunged headlong from the scene that, at last, had shown him the barrier which he had declared could never separate him from the dancing woman he had left to end her orgy with the slobbering, sex-crazed natives.

How he found his pony, he never knew. Instinct guided him, for the great tearing pain which racked him made coherent thought impossible. He threw himself into the saddle, and his merciless whip and spurs urged the pony into a wild gallop down the steep, treacherous trail. He rode with his neck for sale, praying for a fall. Despite sharp, unexpected turns, rolling stones, gullies to be jumped without warning, the pony, miraculously, kept his feet.

The rider forgot his surroundings and the pony slackened his pace and was allowed to continue at his own gait. The first shock over, Felix's brain began to work. This was infinitely worse than the numbing horror of discovery. For a minute a dazzling possibility eased the hurt. Had he been mistaken? Was the woman he had seen dancing half-naked not Thérèse? In the red glare and at the distance, could he have made an error? The dancer had worn no gold bangle around her arm. Of that he was certain, and he had never seen Thérèse without hers. But he could not deceive himself. He would have given anything to be able to do so. In spite of the strangeness of her expression, he knew that the white woman, whose arms were spattered with little trickles of blood, was Thérèse. There was no escaping the fact, hideous as it was.

And this was the confession she had to make to him. This was the thing, about which she must make her decision. Tonight she had promised to see him, and tonight, instead, she was dancing to those hellish tom-toms. No doubt she had sent a note to the hotel, putting him off until the morrow. But the note would not say why. It would not tell that tonight she danced with the voodoos.

A sentence of hers—a sentence spoken in the delirious sweetness of the night before—

came into his memory to taunt him: "No matter what happens, what you may think of me later, never forget that I love you absolutely." Ghastly!

The hotel was dark when he rode in through the gate. He put his pony away, and with dragging footsteps mounted the stairs and let himself into his room. From force of habit he undressed and went to bed. He had no expectation of sleeping, and lay there powerless, even for a minute, to drive the tormenting picture from his brain.

When his sense of fairness at last reasserted itself, the first bitterness which colored his thoughts of Thérèse vanished. He, not she, was to blame for the disastrous muddle his life had now become. She had done all that she could to avert it. How right she had been in sending him away! He and Julia Ashton had made this sickening revelation a possibility.

Then the Thérèse he had known before tonight slipped shyly into the picture. Her deep, grave eyes looked straight into his. He saw her as she had appeared that night aboard the *Texylvania*, exquisite, brilliant, fragile. Then, to mock him, the scarlet dancing woman swayed beside her, bringing with her the memory of the orgy of which she was the center.

What lure could the tom-toms hold to draw the Thérèse Simone he knew away from her world, the world which held the man she loved—even at his bitterest he had not doubted that—and make her a part of the nauseating, savage rites he had witnessed? Worse than savage. To the natives' primitive abandonment to sex, the presence of this beautiful white woman had added an exotic decadence, as wanton as it was intangible.

Now there seemed to be no reason to go to her, when she sent for him, or to hear her announce a decision which, already, he knew she had made. Their love and the degenerate lure of the island orgies had been pitted against each other, and the island had won. No, he would not go to her, even should she send for him. The decision was a relief. Before this, he had been dreading the time when he would have to meet Thérèse face to face and see, not the Thérèse he knew, but the tainted, blood-spattered woman who had danced with abandon for the voodoo gods.

The day came unnoticed. Sunlight flooded the room. Still Blaine lay tortured by his thoughts. It was late, according to island hours, when he went out to the pool for his morning plunge.

AN HOUR later, while he was having his breakfast at a table on the porch, Larsen came out to him. "Good morning, Mr. Blaine. I didn't know you were back from Pétionville. You must have come in late last night. I didn't go to bed myself until after twelve."

"Yes, it was pretty late," Blaine answered perfunctorily.

"Just a minute. I almost forgot something," the proprietor exclaimed, and hurried inside. In a moment he returned. "This came for you late yesterday afternoon. Madame Simone was riding by and left it herself. She asked me to be sure that you got it the minute you returned." Larsen held out an addressed envelope, carefully sealed.

"Thanks," Blaine replied indifferently, as he took it.

Before reading it, he knew its contents. Thérèse would tell him not to come until today. But he would go neither today nor any other day. Why add to his hurt by hearing from her what he already knew: that she had decided to remain on the island, and to remain alone? It was hard enough as it was.

Indifferently he tore open the envelope and drew out the folded sheet. Mechanically, his eyes traveled down the written lines. Then he sat up straight and reread them, wondering.

FELIX DEAR: Come to me at once, no matter how late it is when you get this. I've made my decision but I'm more of a coward than I thought. I'm horribly afraid. Au revoir, and come quickly. All my love. T.

What did this mean? Why had she written him to come when she knew that she would not be at her house, but riding to the meeting-place in the bush?

"Larsen!" Blaine called. "Step here for a minute, will you?"

Felix tried to make the question seem casual when he spoke. "When did you say that Madame Simone left this for me?"

"Yesterday afternoon, sometime around six, and she asked me to be sure you got it, no matter when you came in. When you weren't in by midnight, I decided you'd not come before today, or I would have left it in your room for you. Hope no harm's done."

"No, it's all right," Blaine answered absently. Forgetting Larsen and everything else, he drew out Thérèse's message and read it once more. Then he folded it, slipped it into his pocket and sat staring blankly ahead of him.

With sudden decision he pushed back his chair from the table. He would see Thérèse. Much though he dreaded the meeting, he must talk to her and learn the answer to the hopeless tangle of facts, as he knew them.

"Tell some one to saddle me a pony right away," he called to Larsen as he hurried inside to fetch his sun helmet.

Ten minutes later he rode away from the hotel. For the last time he was going to see Thérèse, and on the morrow he would sail. For once, thank God, luck was with him and there was a northbound steamer due. Aboard it, he would get away from this treacherous, unfathomable island, and the woman who had come into his life only to take away his future and give, in return, one day of unforgettable happiness and a memory which would sear a lifetime.

AS BLAINE dismounted before Thérèse's house, the possibility that she might not be there presented itself for the first time, and with it came the conclusion that, in all probability, she would not be. A glance at the deserted porch strengthened this conclusion.

He ran quickly up the steps. His hand was on the knocker when the door opened and Ida, saturnine and forbidding, stood before him.

"Is Madame Simone here?" he demanded, his voice sharp with anxiety.

"Yes, but she is resting and has given orders not to be disturbed."

"That makes no difference. She's expecting me."

Ida made no move. "She gave orders not to be disturbed," she repeated doggedly from her place in the doorway.

Blaine was convinced that this was simply an excuse to hide Thérèse's absence. He felt certain that she was not in the house, and was determined to find out. He started to enter.

With blazing eyes, the old woman took a step forward, barring the doorway. At the same moment came the sound of an opening door, and Thérèse stepped out of her room.

"Ah, it's you!" she exclaimed when she saw Felix. "I thought I recognized your voice. You may go," she said quietly to the servant, and to Blaine added: "She must have misunderstood me. I told her that I would be out to every one but you."

Blaine stared at her stupidly, his emotions a confused mixture, in which astonishment held the largest place. What he had anticipated, he did not know. But certainly this Thérèse, looking very young in her thin white dress, gravely smiling her welcome, was anything but the woman of his expectations.

"I didn't think I would see you," he said blankly. "I thought you weren't here."

"Why? When I left you I promised that I would be. I wondered what kept you last night. I was beginning to be frightened that something had happened."

Anything but this! Blaine felt that he could have borne callous defiance better than this hypocritical deceit. It was too much. His voice was as hard as flint when he answered.

"Something did happen."

Thérèse looked at him with curiosity. "What?"

"I lost my way and, accidentally, ran into a voodoo ceremony." As he spoke, he looked for a telltale flush on her face, but there was not a sign that his shot had told.

He groaned inwardly. How utterly he had been deceived! She was absolutely callous; had lost even the grace to blush when he told her that he had seen her, half naked, the center of an orgy vile enough to bring a blush to the face of a woman of the streets. As an actress she was superb. Even in his disgust he was forced to admire her poise.

The hurt she had administered produced a corresponding desire to hurt in return. "It happened to be the same ceremony that you elected to grace, half naked." His tone cut like a whip.

No actress could simulate the horror which now came into her face. It was real. "What! What are you saying? Oh, God! Tell me, Felix. No, not here. Some one might overhear. Come outside." Her voice had dropped to a stricken whisper as she glanced apprehensively about. She caught his sleeve and in her impatience almost dragged him after her out of the room. Completely mystified, Blaine listened to her next question.

"When was it? What time? Tell me what you saw! Go on, for God's sake. Tell me the worst and have it over. Was it the Goat Without Horns?"

THE Goat Without Horns! What did she mean? And from her questions one would imagine she knew less than he did of the happenings of the night before. Why this continued pretense?

Suddenly, he saw a possible answer. Bits of stories he had heard came back to him, stories of voodoo priests and their uncanny herb knowledge, potions, hypnotism, all handed down from ancestors in the African jungle and all unknown to science of civilization. The dazzling possibility held him speechless for a minute as he contemplated it.

"Felix, please! Don't sit there staring. Tell me what you saw. I can stand it, even if it's the worst."

"Do you mean that you don't know?"

Now the surprise was in Thérèse's voice. "Of course I don't. How could I?" No one could doubt the sincerity of her words. But neither her answer nor his question seemed to interest her. Intent on something else, she persisted. "Did I, when you saw me, did I have anything in my hands? Was I carrying anything to the altar?" The question came out reluctantly and Blaine saw her brace herself for his reply.

"Two gamecocks—one black and one red."

With a sobbing "Thank God, the time hasn't come yet," she dropped back in her chair and made no effort to hide the hysterical tears that marked the tremendousness of her relief.

Without asking why, with no answer to the puzzle of Thérèse's presence at the orgy, Felix Blaine unquestioningly accepted her innocence. Drugs, hypnotism, whatever it was, Thérèse had had no knowing part in it. Of that he was convinced.

Slowly the nerve-easing sobs grew less violent. At last Thérèse looked up, and Felix was shocked at the sight of her drawn, strained face. "I don't understand; I went to sleep here; I awoke here." She shook her head in bewilderment. After a long thoughtful pause, she turned again to Felix. "Could you have been mistaken? Are you positive it wasn't some one else?"

Felix smiled drearily. "Do you suppose that, already, I haven't tried to tell myself that?"

His words seemed to bring him into her thoughts for the first time. "And yet, after seeing that—and I know all the horror of what you saw—you came to me today?" She paused. "You love me a great deal more than I deserve, Felix. Any man would be more than justified in refusing ever to lay eyes on me again."

"I almost did," he admitted simply. "I had decided to sail tomorrow without attempting to hear your side of it. Then I got your note."

Her hand reached out and touched his. "You haven't heard my side of it yet, but without it, you still believe in me. I don't see how you can." She looked at him wonderingly. "I had decided not to tell you. Now that you know so much, I must tell you the rest. It was to decide this that I came down here alone, and I had concluded to send you away knowing nothing."

She waved aside his attempted interruption. "I was going to do it because I loved you too much to let you become entangled in all the danger which would come to you, once you knew; a danger that you could neither fight nor guard against."

SOME one stepped out on the porch. Both Blaine and Thérèse looked up quickly. It was Ida, who, after delivering an entirely unimportant message, went inside again.

"Came to see whether I am still here, I imagine," Felix said carelessly, after she was gone. "She doesn't approve of me, and after last night, I must say that I feel the same way about her."

"What did she have to do with last night?"

"I don't know, except that she was there."

"Are you quite certain of that?" Thérèse demanded incredulously.

"Absolutely. She was one of the crowd, and watched you as if you were being canonized."

An expression of dawning comprehension came into Madame Simone's face. "I can hardly believe it," she said. "I thought that she was absolutely faithful to me. Tell me, did you notice whether I was wearing this?" She indicated the gold bangle beneath her sleeve.

"No, you were not. There did seem to be something about your arm, but it wasn't the bangle. You were too far off for me to see just what it was."

"Then you are right. Ida must have been there, hard as it is for me to make myself believe it. She must have helped them to get me there. She was in it all. Nobody else, except myself, knows how to unloose this bangle that I've worn ever since—ever since the night I am going to tell you about. Then you will understand why I wear the hideous thing."

ACTING on an impulse, Thérèse put her hand on the gold armlet. "Unless you had seen what you did last night, I doubt very much whether you could credit the story I'm going to tell you. But that, and this, will help you to realize that I'm recounting facts, and not a nightmare."

Her searching fingers found the hidden spring. The gold band opened and she slipped it off. "Look!" she demanded, holding out her bared arm. "Do you wonder that I keep it covered?"

Blaine stared at the unbelievably obscene tattooing that the bangle had hidden.

"Good Lord, Thérèse! What a hell you've lived through! Why do you stay here? Why haven't you got out of this devil's island?"

"For the same reason that people stay in any prison. Because I can't get out."

"Ridiculous! Do you mean to say that in this day and time you can't get away? What's holding you?"

Thérèse made a gesture toward the hills. "The island," she said. "And every one of the million natives is a jailer. There's always some one watching to see that I don't break through my invisible bars. Ida is the one person whom, until now, I counted on. Now I know that she, too, is with them. I realize that this sounds hysterical and impossible, but listen and I'll try to make you understand."

She slipped the bangle around her arm, snapped it shut, and after a keen glance about to be certain that nobody had seen her remove it, began her story.

I'll have to begin with my childhood. Possibly you already know that I was born on the island. Anyway, I was, and lived here until I was five. Naturally, I haven't a very consecutive recollection of those years, just flashes of remembrance.

"Ida is the one outstanding personality of those days. My mother died when I was three weeks old and I was left almost entirely in my nurse's charge. She adored me, and still does. That, really, is the foundation of all that happened later."

"And to prove her affection, dopes you and spirits you off into the hills to take part in those beastly ceremonies. Not much adoration there," Blaine commented.

Thérèse smiled bitterly. "You don't understand native mentality. The two outstanding things in Ida's life are her love for me and voodoo worship. Religious fanaticism isn't entirely confined to civilization, you know. But to go on. Among all the jumble of early childhood recollections, one stands out vividly in my memory. I never understood it until after my return to the island, four years ago, and had come almost to believe it was a dream.

"I awakened in Ida's arms. It was night and we were in the bush. Another native woman was leaning over me. There were torches all about and tom-toms. Something pricked my arm and I cried out. Then I went to sleep again. Afterward, I don't know when, I asked Ida about it and she told me I had dreamed it; but inside my arm were five little black dots, making a rude pattern. Years afterward, when they became a part of the tattooing, I knew.

"When I was about five, my father made some sort of arrangement about the coffee plantations and we went home to Europe. He had always hated the island, and after my mother died here, hated it even more. He wouldn't even take Ida with us, because she reminded him of it.

"From then until four years ago when he died, we lived all over the world, here, there and everywhere. I had a governess, Madame Erinza, who after I grew up became a sort of chaperon, and came here to Haiti with me when some matters connected with settling the estate made the trip necessary. When we got here, we went straight to the plantation near Jacmel, in the south of the island, the same place where I had lived as a child."

Thérèse stopped speaking. "The rest of the story," she said, after a long pause, "is the secret which has made my life a thing not worth the keeping. If I could only get away from it . . . But I can't. I'll never leave this island." Thérèse uttered the words with the hopelessness of utter conviction. "These natives never relax their watching for a minute."

"But you will get away, sweetheart. Whatever the obstacles are, we'll overcome them together." Felix tried to put the ring of complete certainty into his assurance, without entire success. Despite himself, he had begun to feel that an invisible hand hovered over them, waiting to drag them back should they attempt to escape. Escape from what? If they wished, what was to prevent them from going aboard the ship which would sail tomorrow? "We'll not only go, but we'll go tomorrow," he said aloud.

Terrified, Thérèse looked quickly about. "Be careful. Don't say that aloud. You don't understand. Let me finish."

Almost as if she were reading from a book, she resumed her story.

"WHEN we arrived at my coffee plantation, we found everything prepared for our reception, and Ida installed as a sort of over-servant. From the first she adored me, spoiled me and tyrannized over me, as if I were still five instead of twenty. Those first days were dreary beyond description—as dreary as Madame Erinza herself. There was nothing to do, no one to see, and the business affair dragged on until I almost despaired of ever settling it. Yet I couldn't leave Haiti until I did.

"It was while I was in this state of restless impatience and boredom that Ida first began to talk to me about voodoo ceremonies and secret rites. It was all by hints and innuendo at first, but I seized on it with avidity. The mystery of it, and the fact that it was something about which no white person knew anything, attracted me and aroused my curiosity. Hazy pictures of my childhood made me even keener, and when I was alone with Ida, I never left off my questioning.

"At first she wouldn't talk. Wasn't sure of me, no doubt. Then one night after I had plagued her for weeks, she consented to take me into the bush to see them dance. The scene fascinated. They were dancing in the moonlight and their brown bodies seemed a part of the waving shadows of the palms that fringed the clearing, shadows which shifted and merged into the gloom from which they had come. I saw it all from a distance. Ida refused to let me go near, and after a few minutes insisted on leaving.

"That was the beginning. Afterward we went more and more frequently into the bush. This kept up for some time, until, one night, we were discovered watching a dance from our usual hiding-place. The confusion and excitement that followed were proofs of how jealously the natives guard their secrets. We were dragged out into the clearing and surrounded by a very ugly mob—and a very threatening one. I was horribly frightened, and know now how well I had a right to be. Except for Ida, I would never have left the place alive. She—and there was something almost triumphant in it—jerked back my sleeve and pointed dramatically to the five dots tattooed inside my arm.

"At once everything changed. The natives dropped back and stood regarding me curiously and with unmistakable friendliness. Then an old woman hobbled up and made a circle around me with meal poured from a halved gourd. This done, she held out a cup and told me to drink what was in it. Ida motioned me to do as the *mamaloi* directed, and I was too frightened to refuse. When I took the cup from my lips, a great shout went up from the watchers. The tom-toms beat wildly and every one began to dance. In the confusion that followed we slipped away.

"When I insisted on Ida's telling me what the dots meant, I let myself be satisfied with a half-truth. She said that when I was a baby she had them put on as a charm against evil spirits, and that after I had been marked by a *mamaloi*, I had a right to go to any voodoo ceremony. If I had half guessed the truth, I'd have left the island the next day. Now I never will."

Thérèse would not permit Felix's attempted interruption, and continued her story. Evidently she wished to get to its end as quickly as possible.

"I think I must have been more frightened than I realized, for that ended my night adventures for some time. Ida tried to persuade me to go, but always I refused.

"After a time, I began to miss the excitement. My business seemed as far from a settlement as ever, and time hung unendurably heavy on my hands. Then I did the thing I've been paying for ever since. Ida had nothing to do with it. She was ill with fever at the time. I'm certain that if she had been with me, it would never have happened—certainly not in the way it did.

"I WAS lying awake in bed one night when the tom-toms began. I listened to them for a while; tried to go to sleep and found myself listening again. Then—I can't explain this to you, Felix; I don't understand it myself—they began to call me. The rhythm of their beat took possession of me. I got up, dressed and slipped out of my room into the night. Following the sound of the tom-toms, I went through the bush until I could see the light of the torches and on into the clearing itself. At a glance, I realized that this was no ordinary dance. It was entirely different from anything I had seen before. Nobody paid any attention to me. Now, in their eyes, I was one of them.

"I watched the sacrifices of the gamecocks and the goat, and was sick with the beastliness of the whole horrible business. I wanted to leave, but something held me. The blood and the noise and that indescribable smell of tafia and mad humanity. I couldn't go. I seemed to have lost the power to make my limbs act. Then it came. It's as vivid now as it was when I stood there and watched, one white woman in that blood-crazed mob of savages."

A shudder she could not repress passed over her. Her eyes were black with the pain and horror of the reviewed picture. Her voice sank to a tense whisper.

"A black woman, young and full-breasted, stepped out of the shadows. Her mouth was wide open, her strong white teeth gleamed between her thick lips, twisted into a maniac's smile. Held out before her was a baby, a tiny one not more than a year old. He was laughing and holding out his hands to the bright torches. Even then I didn't realize what was to happen. If I had, I could have done nothing. For my life, I couldn't have moved. At the altar the woman stopped and laid the child down before it. The watchers stood breathless. There wasn't a sound except the little boy's cooing. I tried to scream and couldn't.

"Then the old woman, the one who had sacrificed the goat, came out and gave the same knife to the young one who had brought the child to the altar.

"The blade flashed once. There was a little whimpering wail as it descended. Then everything went black. I had seen the Sacrifice of the Goat Without Horns.

"When I woke, it was day and I was in my bed. Ida was bending over me, crooning and all solicitude. 'Oh, my baby! Why did you go without Ida? Why did you go?' But I hardly heard her. I could do nothing but lie and stare at the obscenity tattooed around my arm, the real meaning of which I was not to know until months later.

"That day we left for Port au Prince, Madame Erinza, Ida and I, with the terrible tattooing hidden under this bangle that I picked up once at Benares. Madame Erinza could not understand my unexpected leaving, but nothing could have induced me to stay, even for another day, in the south. I'd have gone mad. You see, I was so foolishly ignorant that I believed that, once away from that particular vicinity, I'd leave the whole awful affair behind me, and my purpose was to finish my business as speedily as possible from Port au Prince, and then to leave the island for good.

"Not long after we came here, Georges Simone, whom I'd known in Europe, learned that I was here and came over from France. Before I sailed he had asked me to marry him and I had refused. Here in Haiti, a link to my old life, he seemed a very different person from the Georges Simone I had known in Paris. I promised to marry him. When I told Ida, she was frantic, and never, up to the very day of my marriage, ceased to beg me not to. Of course, I paid no attention.

"On my wedding day, she came very early to my room. I was awake and she stood for a while looking at me, her face as expressionless as an image's. 'The great *papaloi* back there has sent you this and a message. He says that you have seen the Sacrifice and he forbids you to marry the white man.' Then she laid a dried bat's wing on the side of my bed and went out again.

"THAT morning I was married. In the afternoon, Georges Simone was lying dead in the garden—murdered. It was useless to try to discover who actually struck the blow. I knew—and every native in the island knew—that voodoo was showing me its power."

"But I don't understand. Why did they kill Simone?" Felix demanded.

"Because he was taking me away. Now don't you understand why I tried to hide from you—tried to make you leave the island? I'm safe. Nothing can happen to me," she explained drearily. "But if they even suspect that you are trying to take me away, you're as good as dead. Go away, dear, while there's time."

Blaine leaned over and took Thérèse's hand in both of his. "Listen to me," he said quietly. "I'm going away when you go with me, not before. That's final, so there's nothing more to be said about it. The question is, how are we to do it? To save me I can't see why it should be difficult."

"It will be. More than once I've tried and always, somehow, they've managed to keep me. If we go, we've got to do it with every native in the island trying to prevent it. Until today I thought that one—Ida—would help me. Now I know that even she is not to be counted on."

"But don't you see, dear? The very fact that you did trust her made an escape harder. She knew all your plans and warned the others."

A ray of hope flickered for a moment in Thérèse's eyes, then disappeared. "Yes, I see that, but listen to the rest that I have to tell you before we discuss this possibility that I don't even dare contemplate.

"After Georges was killed, I ran away. I couldn't stand the maudlin curiosity of Port au Prince. With no one but Ida I went to the hut in the mountains, and stayed there three months. Poor Madame Erinza, terrified, had deserted me and sailed on the ship which Georges and I would have left on.

"While I was up in the mountains, by accident, I learned the real reason why I was being held in the island. When I did, it was hard to decide whether it wouldn't have been better to remain ignorant of what was ahead of me.

"Handed down with the rest of voodoo superstition and sorcery—I know no other word for some of the things the priests can do—is a belief as old as the religion itself.

"The Sacrifice of the Goat Without Horns is the supreme devotional act. Nothing else can stay the wrath of the voodoo god. The supremacy of the whites, slavery, every misfortune is a result of his anger. But a day when the blacks will be supreme is promised. That day dawns when a white woman brings a child to the altar and plunges a knife into his heart."

Thérèse's eyes caught and held Blaine's. "I am the woman who is to make the sacrifice. The mark around my arm shows that I have been chosen. Until now, I have always believed that the knife in my hand would save me. I could kill myself. Now that I know that last night, drugged, I took part in a ceremony, even that is gone."

"God in heaven!" Blaine whispered.

HIS thoughts full of the story Thérèse had told him, Blaine rode back to his hotel. Away from Thérèse and the convincing spell of her voice, he began to see the situation from another angle. How could the natives, if they were ignorant beforehand of her intention, hinder her from leaving the island if she desired to go? Even if there was no "law and order" to be counted on for protection, he failed to see how she could be prevented, the next day, from driving through the streets and going aboard the ship. The case of Georges Simone, and later, Thérèse's own unaided attempts, he could understand. Neither she nor Simone had realized that there was a danger to be guarded against. And more, until now, the fact that Ida was playing the spy had been unsuspected. Unless the natives received a warning beforehand, Blaine felt confident that they would be powerless to interfere. With this thought, came an idea. Turning his pony, he rode down to the British Legation. When he arrived, he asked to see the Minister, and was at once shown into Crewe's office.

"Hello!" the Englishman exclaimed, as Felix came in. "What can have brought you here through all this heat?" During Blaine's stay in the island the two men had come to know each other fairly intimately, as usually happens in small foreign colonies.

"To ask you to do me a favor. You diplomatic chaps always have a way of doing things on the quiet, and I want you to engage two cabins on tomorrow's boat for New York, and keep it very dark for whom they are taken. Also, you may congratulate me. Madame Simone and I are to be married, but for reasons I needn't go into, the ceremony will take place in New York and not here."

Crewe held out his hand. "Indeed I do congratulate you. You're a very lucky man. Of course I'll see to the cabins, and will be very certain that nobody knows they are for you. I'll engage them in the Legation's name and you can claim them after you go aboard."

"Thanks so much—and please be sure no one knows."

"Never fear."

It was not until after dinner that Blaine saw Thérèse again. He found her alone on the porch and at once told her what he had done. "The boat has been heard from and will arrive on time, so we sail at five tomorrow. You can leave here, ostensibly to go to Julia's or any other place, drive to the pier and go aboard before any one knows, much less plans anything to hinder you. I'll do the same. It's simplicity itself. Now that we know that Ida has been spying on you, the element of surprise is all on our side, and we're bound to succeed. Don't you agree?"

"While you're talking about it, yes," Thérèse answered with a worried frown. "It sounds almost too simple and easy. But are you sure that no one suspects? They're so cunning, these natives. Don't forget that every single one is watching me —and you, too, now. Of course they all know about your arrival at the hut, and my return here. Some one was peering in at us that night."

"I know it. Ida, I think. Don't you remember how she kept popping in and out for no reason at all?"

Thérèse nodded. "Yes. Poor Ida! I don't know whether you can see it or not, but, in a way, it's because she loves me that she has done all of this. To her, to be chosen to offer the great sacrifice is the biggest thing that could come to any one. She believes it."

Before he could put his definite and very unfavorable opinion of Ida into words, he was amazed to hear Thérèse begin to laugh.

"Felix, I've just thought of something."

"What?" he demanded, mystified at her sudden change of mood.

"Clothes. We'll arrive in New York in the same things we wear to the ship. Isn't it typical of a woman to think of her looks when everything in the world is at stake? I've one consolation, however. You'll be equally mussy."

"You don't think we must leave our luggage and—"

Thérèse gave him no time to finish his query. "Of course. Listen, Felix!" She was very anxious now. "If we're to succeed, we must do nothing, absolutely nothing, to let them suspect. If they do, something will happen. I'm not exaggerating, dear. I know these natives and have tried to get away before. Always, something happened. Promise me that you'll leave the hotel, just as if you expected to return within a half-hour."

Blaine caught the old note of terror which was coming back into her voice, and hastened to reassure her.

"And there's one thing more. Don't eat or drink a thing that a native has had a chance to doctor. I may be overcautious, but I can't rid myself of the fear that, somehow, they'll guess what we intend to do. As for myself, I shan't touch a thing until I am aboard and the ship has sailed."

UNTIL almost midnight, they sat and planned, and with the passing of the hours, their surety of success grew until, for the first time since she had known the fate that the island held for her, Thérèse felt that there was a hope of escaping it. She watched him until he rode out of the gates and then went inside and to bed. Contrary to all her expectations, almost at once she dropped off to sleep.

When she opened her eyes, it was day. The turning of her door-knob had awakened her. Ida peered in and, seeing that her mistress was awake, brought her coffee to the bedside table. After opening the shutters halfway, putting out slippers and kimono, she shuffled out.

From force of habit, Thérèse poured her coffee. Then she remembered. Very quietly, she slipped out of bed and, cup in hand, went over to a half-open window. She peered out cautiously. There was no one in sight, and quickly she emptied the cup into a flower bed. The three slices of thinly cut bread, she rolled into a tight ball and dropped among the broad-leafed plants beneath the window. Then she went back to bed and to delicious rose-colored day-dreams until a servant came to say that Mrs. Ashton was calling and would wait for her on the porch.

While Thérèse sat outside talking to Julia, delighted to have some one with whom to while away some of the dragging hours until afternoon, Ida puttered about her mistress's room, setting it to rights. Today she went about her duties mechanically, her eyes darting inquisitively about the room. Plainly puzzled, she put down her palm broom and walked over to the window, where she stood staring outside. Something round and white, half hidden beneath the leaves of a flowering plant, caught her eye. At once she was all keen attention.

Leaving her work, she slipped out of the house by a back door and hurried around to the flower bed. Picking up the ball of bread, she stood regarding it intently. Then she dropped down on her knees and passed her hand slowly over the earth. Her fingers found a spot still damp. Nodding her head understandingly, she then scrambled to her feet and hobbled off quickly to her own little hut. Inside it, she took a rolled-up packet from its hiding-place, a packet which, before light that morning, had been brought to her by another woman who had walked all night through the bush to deliver it.

Opening it, she thoughtfully fingered the collection of dried roots, bark and leaves inside. Painstakingly, she made her choice. Then she went to one of the outdoor stone and mud stoves, threw a few pieces of charcoal into the little scooped-out grate. and began to brew her mixture. When the water began to boil, from time to time, she dropped a pinch of something into the steaming kettle. Finally she lifted it from the fire and carried it inside her hut to cool.

At lunch time, Thérèse could invent nothing better than a headache to account for her failure to touch food. A strange glance from Ida's watchful eyes made her uneasy. Was it possible that she knew something of what was racing through her mistress's brain? Everything was going much too smoothly. She didn't like it.

Three o'clock. She tossed restlessly on her bed, where the simulated headache had taken her. She must stop thinking, conjuring up every conceivable horror.

In another half-hour her nerves were strained to the snapping point. If she had only thought of it, they could have arranged some way for Felix to let her know that he was in no danger—that they were unsuspected.

As if in answer to her wish, Ida came into the room, bringing a big bunch of pale yellow roses. "M'sieur Blaine has just sent these to you," she said, crossing to the bed.

Thérèse thrilled. It was like Felix to guess her fears and devise this wordless assurance. She stretched out her arms for the flowers.

"How lovely they are!" she exclaimed as Ida gave them to her. "Ouch! But they've certainly got thorns."

WHILE Madame Simone was admiring his gift, Blaine was wandering restlessly up and down the hotel porch, with nothing to do but await the hour of departure. A little before four he called a hotel trap and directed the driver to go to the British Legation. He alighted at the gates, dismissed the vehicle, and as soon as it was around the corner, on foot, set out for the ship. Nobody molested him. No one seemed even to notice him as he walked through the confusion of the long pier.

Aboard, he sought out the purser, who showed him to the two cabins reserved for the British Legation. "We sail at five, don't we?"

"Five, sharp," the purser corroborated as he left him.

Blaine was exultant. It was too easy. Why had he let himself worry, or consider for a minute that there was any real difficulty or danger? Undoubtedly, he and Thérèse could have driven down together, luggage piled high about them, with no more molestation from the natives than he had encountered.

Luggage! He made a wry face when he considered that the razor, now hidden in his pocket along with his pistol, was all he had brought. Silly, but the precaution had made Thérèse more comfortable. That, in itself, was reason enough for the five days of discomfort ahead. Imaginary dangers are as terrifying as real ones. And there was no doubt that Thérèse was really frightened and also was convinced that it was impossible for her to get away from the island. In a few minutes now she would have proof to the contrary.

He glanced at his watch. Twenty minutes to five. She should arrive soon. He went on deck and began to watch for her. Another five minutes passed and he began to feel a vague uneasiness. The minutes slipped by, and still no sight of her. Blaine no longer pretended to himself that he felt no misgiving. In another five he was in a panic. What had happened? What was keeping her? Surely she should be here by now. His eyes traveled quickly, hopefully down the long pier. She was not there.

There was a long-drawn, roaring whistle. Sailors began to loosen the lashings of the gangway. Once more Felix looked despairingly down the pier. It was empty. Something had gone wrong. Fool! Why had he ever consented to allow her to come alone to the ship? He should have known better. She had warned him that they were attempting the impossible, and he had not heeded, had thought it hysteria.

All his self-reproach flaying him, he rushed across the deck to where a junior officer was standing. His imperiousness overrode the youngster's objections, and a minute later he was explaining the situation to the captain.

"My companion has not arrived—a delay of some sort," he said as calmly as he could. "Can't the ship be held for a little while?"

The captain's refusal was emphatic.

"But it must be. It's a matter of life and death," Felix answered in the tone of a man who is accustomed to having his orders obeyed.

"Who are you?" the captain inquired, looking at him keenly.

"Felix Blaine; Blaine and Grant, Wall Street."

Evidently the name was a familiar one. The captain hesitated. "And do you mean, literally, that it is a matter of life and death?" he asked with maddening slowness.

"Absolutely."

"I suppose you know that it is against all the Company's orders, but under the circumstances, I'll hold the ship for—" He consulted his watch. "It's exactly five now. If you'll agree to stand any resulting loss, I'll wait for just one hour, not a minute longer."

"Agreed," Blaine snapped eagerly, and without wasting a minute in further talk, hurried down the gangway and set out, on the run, down the pier.

In the street, he stopped the first passing carriage. "Take me to Madame Simone's up on the hill, and be quick if you want a big tip," he managed in patois.

The driver shook his head stupidly.

Impatiently, Blaine repeated the words. Once more the man shook his head.

With every minute precious, Felix hailed another. The same thing happened. The driver only stared and repeated, "I don't understand."

This time Blaine knew what it meant. They understood him well enough. They wouldn't take him. That was the answer. Thinking of the time he must waste reaching her house on foot, he tried a third, with the same result.

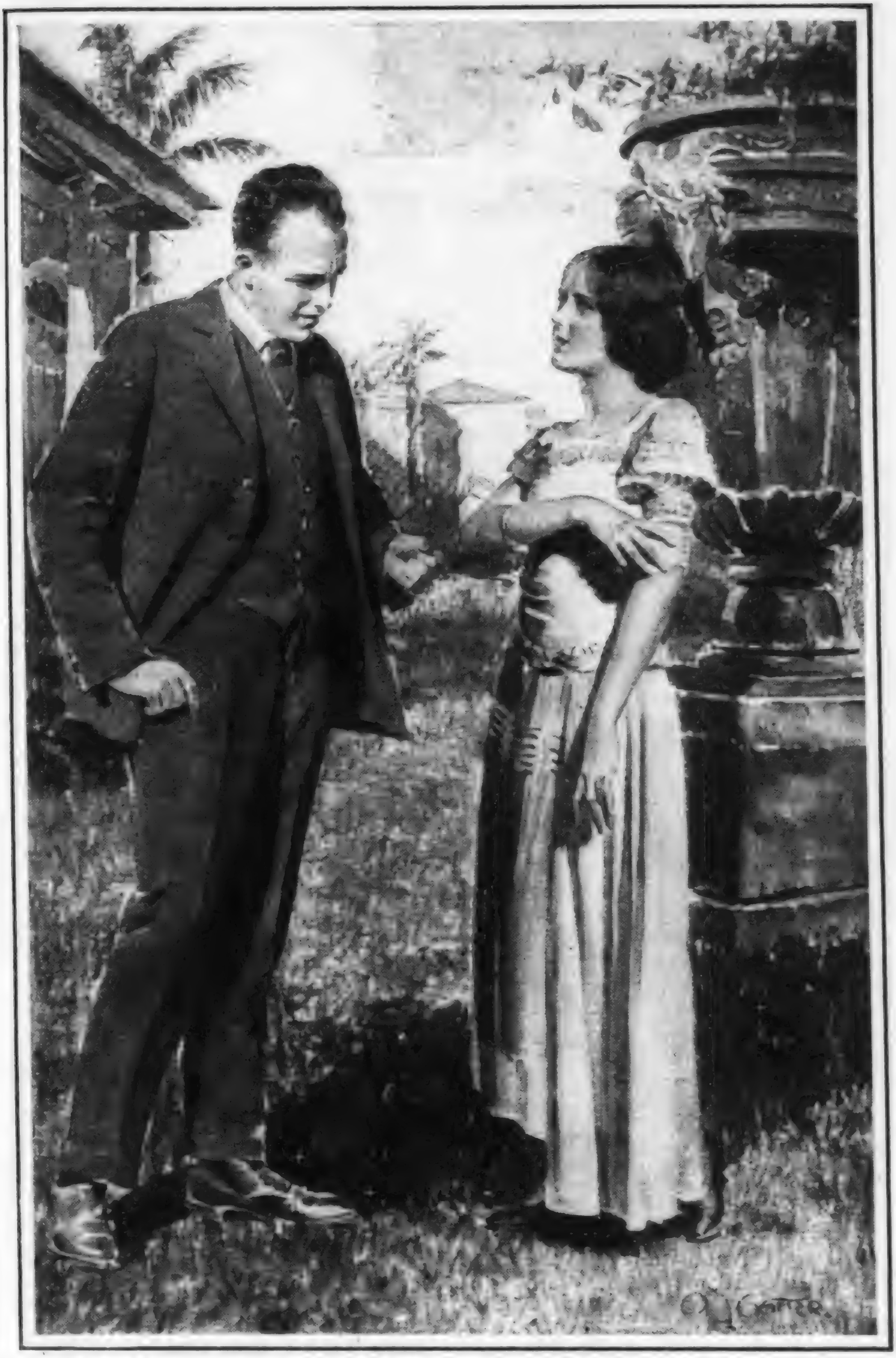
RUNNING, he set out through the steaming streets. Now there were curious glances, enough and to spare. But Blaine saw none of them. He was too absorbed even to hear the derisive laughter which floated after him from a knot of street-corner ragamuffins. Cursing the natives, the island, himself, he toiled breathlessly up the hill.

Outwit them! Take them by surprise! Thérèse had been right. The whole island was banded together to prevent her going. What had they done to her? His fears became unendurable. He quickened his pace. His breath came in gasps. At her gate he glanced at his watch. There was still half an hour before the ship would sail. If only they hadn't spirited her away to the hills!

The porch was empty, and his fears redoubled. He dashed inside. No one was to be seen there. "Thérèse," he called. "Thérèse!" No reply.

He ran down the hall and threw open the door of her bedroom. With an involuntary gasp of amazement, he stood stock still.

Thérèse, lying stretched out on her bed,



Thérèse's searching fingers found the hidden spring. "Look!" she demanded, holding out her bared arm. "Do you wonder that I keep it covered?"

was sleeping as quietly as a child. Scattered all about her was a mass of fading yellow roses.

A glimmering of their meaning reached him. In a second he was beside her. His excitement made him forgetful of his strength as he caught her by her shoulder and shook her roughly. "Thérèse! Wake up!"

Slowly she opened her eyes. "What is it?" she asked vaguely, still half asleep. Then consciousness returned. She jumped up and stood beside Blaine, gripping his arm. "What happened? What time is it? I got your roses and then—"

"My roses? What do you mean?"

"These."

Felix stared curiously at the flowers which gave no hint that from midday until the minute before they were put into Thérèse's arms, their stems and thorns had soaked in a scum-covered fluid in Ida's hut. "I never saw them before," he said emphatically.

Thérèse understood. "So they've beaten us," she said dully.

"I'm damned if they have," Felix exploded, raging. "I've arranged with the captain to hold the ship an hour for us. We've still got time, but we'll have to take your pony trap and drive like hell. And if anybody tries to stop us—" He took his pistol from his hip and slipped it conveniently into a side pocket. "I'm going to shoot first and ask questions afterward. We're going to sail on that ship, and all the natives on the island won't prevent it."

Thérèse did not hesitate. The determination in her eyes was equal to his. While he spoke, she crammed a hat over her disheveled hair. "I'm ready," she said crisply, and smiled up into his face as they went out together.

They hurried out of the front door. Simultaneously, they stopped still and stood staring at the harbor that stretched out far beneath them.

Gaining speed with every revolution of her screw, a trail of black smoke streaming from her single funnel, their ship was steaming out of the harbor.

NOT until long afterward did they learn that a red-uniformed port official had stood watch until Blaine had left the ship, then had hurried aboard to whisper the terror words of the tropics. True or not, the words "yellow fever" were enough to drive both Blaine and the agreement from the captain's mind. With visions of quarantine or worse, he had given immediate sailing orders.

Felix dreaded the moment when he must turn and face Thérèse. How would she take it? But he might have spared himself his fears. Her courage was unfaltering, her self-control heartbreaking evidence of her long days in the school of disappointment.

"And you were aboard. You could have gone." Thérèse bit her lip and quickly turned away. One more word and her voice would break and betray the despair with which she pictured the future. Without another word, she walked to the end of the porch and dropped into a chair.

Until she had stood beside Felix and watched the departing ship, she had not realized how much she had permitted herself to believe in the success of their attempt. Now for another two weeks, possibly longer, they would be completely cut off from the world. Before the next ship arrived anything might happen. She faced the facts squarely. Georges Simone had attempted to take her away, and Georges Simone had been murdered. Now the natives knew that Felix had attempted to do the same thing. What would happen to him?

She glanced at Blaine, who had come and taken the chair beside hers. He was not looking at her, but sat staring, brows knit, toward the fast disappearing ship.

"And still I can't imagine how they found out," he muttered aloud. "However, it seems hardly worth while to wonder. Evidently, they did." He turned and looked at Thérèse. "We won't fail again. Next time we'll succeed." But the assurance had gone out of his voice. Like the woman beside him, he was beginning to feel the never-sleeping vigilance of the island.

"Do you think there's any use in pretending longer? You've no more real hope of success than I have. We might as well face it," Thérèse replied seriously.

"I won't believe it," Blaine protested rebelliously, and because he did, repeated his protest. "I held them too cheaply. I underestimated them. But I can't imagine any possible way that they could have found out."

Had he known that Mrs. Crewe was sitting on the porch, just outside the Minister's office, when he and Crewe talked of ship reservations, he might have guessed. Servants can hear repeated gossip as well as can their mistresses.

WITH eyes blind to the soft beauty of the tropical night, Blaine stood at his window staring out into the darkness. It was very still and peaceful. The palms rustled softly in the errant breeze, as they whispered their island secrets in the starlight. From far down in the sleeping town came the faint "*Qui vi*' " of a drowsy sentry, no louder than the call of a startled night bird.

Felix turned impatiently from the window and began to pace the room. The very calmness of the world outside added fuel to the turmoil within him.

Plans, some wild, some with a measure of saneness, presented themselves in quick succession. He would go to New York, charter a boat and smuggle her out of the island. He would— One scheme after another he entertained and discarded. They all took time, and he could count on none.

The three days since he and Thérèse had watched the ship sail had been an eternity of misery for them both: for her the ever-present fear that he would suffer the fate of Georges Simone; for him the fear that, drugged and helpless, she would be taken to the bush to offer the sacrifice. Miserably undecided, fighting hard against a growing certainty of helplessness, he continued his nervous pacing from window to door and back again.

Abruptly he stopped and stood listening. There was no mistaking the sound which had caught and held his attention. From the native section of the town had come the sharp *ping* of a rifle shot. Another followed, and another. Then a rattling fusillade.

People began to move about. From below came the hum of unintelligible voices. Blaine stood for a moment and listened, then went down to the bar. Larsen and all the hotel guests—there were six besides himself—were there. As he came in some one demanded excitedly: "What is it? What's happening?"

"Damn if I know!" Larsen answered. "Sounds like a revolution. Maybe it's no more than a street fight. Sometimes—"

The menacing drone of a machine-gun stopped him midway in his sentence.

"There they go!" he exclaimed. "It's a revolution, all right. That's the palace machine-gun." The proprietor's tone of tolerant amusement at native revolutions and all things connected with them did much to reassure his guests, who seemed to be far from enjoying native politics in action.

Blaine's first thought was of Thérèse. With it came the surety that, of all the people in the island, no matter what turn events might take, she was the one person who was absolutely safe. The natives would see that no harm befell the woman who, they believed, would bring to them a brilliant future.

Despite this, he determined to ride over to her house and reassure himself. Soon after daylight, despite Larsen's protests, he called to a stableboy who preferred the safety of the hillside hotel to the excitement of the town, and told him to saddle a pony.

"You'd better not go," the proprietor persisted as Blaine rode past the house on his way out.

Blaine laughed. "Why not? The firing has practically stopped. And besides, ever since I've been here I've heard that Haitian revolutions are always bloodless parties where every one shoots in the air and runs like hell. Certainly doesn't sound dangerous. Anyway, I'll risk it."

At the foot of the hill he got his first unpleasant shock of surprise. The stories of comic-opera revolution he had heard had not prepared him for the scene. Stretched out in the street, just where they had fallen, were the sprawling bodies of a score of ragamuffin soldiers. Just before him was one, lying on his back. His face, upturned to the mounting sun, still held the expression of stupid surprise that must have come to it when the bullet tore through his ragged uniform, bringing, too late, the realization that this revolution was being played contrary to all rules previously observed.

Some one called his name. Looking back he saw Herbert Crewe, who, like himself, was on horseback. "Where are you going?"

"To Madame Simone's."

"I've just come from up on the hill. Everything is quiet up there. I wonder if you'd mind going first with me down into the town. I've got to go down to the jail to find whether there's any truth in a rumor I've just heard. Frankly, I'm not particularly keen about going alone."

WITH Crewe's reassurance to confirm his certainty of Thérèse's safety, he turned off into a side street. "What's this rumor you want to verify?"

"I don't want to verify it. I hope to God it isn't true. I don't like the look of things now, and if it's true, there'll be hell to pay."

Blaine said nothing, waiting for his companion to continue.

"Just now a native rushed into my Legation, wild with excitement; said the president had sent an order to the jailers to kill all the political prisoners. There are about a couple of hundred of them, I think. If it's true, this town will be hell on earth the minute it's found out. Already there's a mob around the palace, which isn't too pleasant, since it's next door to me."

The two men rode on to the jail, where they found a growing crowd standing outside, too stunned at something to do more than stand and stare stupidly at the foreigners.

Dismounting, Blaine and Crewe walked quickly past them. At the door both men hesitated, looked at each other, then unwillingly stepped inside.

The sickening picture before them, indelible as it would always be in their brains, Blair saw at first only in its relation to Thérèse and himself. It meant a respite, even if a short one. For the time, this would drive every other thought from the natives' minds. Pity came afterward. True, these people were his enemies. But this!

The jail, one story high, was built around a patio on which the cells faced. In this square, heaped up like a pile of old shoes, were the murdered prisoners. Little rivulets of warm blood still trickled out from beneath them. Over them, flashing in the quivering sunshine, droning blue-bottle flies already had begun to hover. No one had been shot. The hacked and mutilated bodies showed this. On the edge of the heap lay a man, finished by a single bayonet thrust. Across his feet lay another, the top of his head taken off and turned over by a machete blow from behind.

While Blaine looked, powerless to overcome a growing nausea, there was a slow, shifting movement in the heap before him. He shuddered, his eyes glued to the spot. Slowly, a man wet with his own blood and the blood that had seeped down from the bodies which lay on top of him, dragged himself from the piled-up dead. He looked about wildly, his eyes insane with the horror they had seen. Shrieking, he ran outside.

"Let's get out of this," Crewe proposed shakily. "I'm off to wire again for a ship, and I hope my message gets through. We're going to need one."

"This is like the hell I imagined when I was a child," Blaine said as the two men left the jail.

Crewe nodded. "Yes, and it's going to be worse. Now's the time we need a warship here. Anything may happen. I've wired; so has the French Minister and yours. Our best chance is the *Texylvania*, but there's no telling if any of our messages went through."

At the street that led up to Thérèse's house, the two men parted. Although certain that she was safe, and knowing that his presence was a danger rather than a protection, Blaine could not resist the temptation to go and see with his own eyes that she was unharmed.

The peace and quiet about the house seemed unreal, after the hell down in the town. Thérèse for whom revolutions were no novelty, was sitting quietly on the porch. Joining her, he told her briefly what he had seen.

For the second time that day, Felix heard the wish for a warship. "I've never seen a revolution like this one," Thérèse told him. "Until now, they've always amounted to nothing but a little excitement." For a moment, she became thoughtful. "Felix, take my trap and drive down for Julia, will you? The natives don't like foreigners, you know. If things continue, she mustn't be there in her house. Bring her up here. This house, for the moment, is the safest place on the island."

When he returned with Mrs. Ashton, who was only too willing to come, he found a man from the British Legation waiting for him with a note. He read it, then hurried to Julia and Thérèse.

"It's from Crewe. The president has managed to escape from the palace and has taken refuge in the British Legation. Crewe fears an attempt to take him out, and wants me to come down."

Guessing his thoughts, Thérèse interrupted him. "Julia and I are perfectly safe here. Go. I don't think the natives will ever dare invade a foreign Legation. They never have, but that's neither here nor there. Go right away."

UNMOLESTED, unnoticed even, Felix made his way through the streets. On his way he passed knots of natives, all gesticulating fiercely, all angry-eyed. A crowd had gathered in the street before the Legation, but inside the walls the grounds were empty. So far, no one had dared enter.

Crewe met him at the door. "Thank you for coming," he said as he shook hands. "I don't know what I'm letting you in for, but it looks as if they were going to have a try at getting the president. He's hiding from them upstairs, and he's got the wind up properly."

Inside were the French Minister and the American Minister, who had been at his home, ill, ever since Blaine's arrival in Port au Prince. It was evident that he was still far from well.

"What do you plan doing?" Felix asked, after speaking to the others.

It was Crewe who answered. "There isn't much we four can do if the natives really make up their minds to get in. The only thing I can see is to try to prevent them from starting. Personally, I don't care what happens to the president. After that jail slaughter, nothing could be more than he deserves. It's the other part that worries me. Let them find out that they can come inside a Legation and take a refugee out, without summary punishment, and they'll make a clean sweep and finish the whole foreign colony while they're about it. The only reason they haven't done it long ago is their fear of a vague 'something' that will happen to them if they do. This fear may still hold them. If it doesn't, the jig's up."

"Not a doubt about that," the French Minister put in. "If they begin, they won't stop. The one thing to do is to try to stave it off until a ship comes—if one does."

An hour passed uneventfully. The crowd grew denser, but contented itself with hurling threats and imprecations at the man hiding inside. No one dared venture within the forbidden grounds. At last three of the leaders summoned sufficient courage to open the gates and step experimentally inside. As one man, the watchers started toward the door.

"Wait!" Crewe counseled sharply. "I'm going out there and try to put the fear of God into them. It may work. Anyway, it can't hurt matters. If they start, it's certainly all up." Without waiting for a reply he stepped out on the porch.

The others watched anxiously as, bareheaded and apparently unarmed, the lone white man walked down the long driveway toward the mob. The three natives looked toward the gates they had just entered, undecided whether to retreat or hold their ground. A rifle from somewhere in the crowd cracked sharply; but the bullet went wide of the mark and the firing was not repeated. Crewe did not hesitate. This apparent indifference to danger had its effect. Before he was within speaking distance, the three leaders slunk outside and lost themselves in the press. At the gate, Crewe stopped. The men in the house noted his imperious gestures, but could only guess at his words. Then he contemptuously turned his back and returned to the house.

"So far, so good," he said as he stepped inside. "But I'm free to admit that my walk back from the gates with all those rifles behind me was about the longest one I've ever taken. And this sort of business isn't going to hold them long. I think if that pot shot had got me, they'd have made a rush then. They'll not stay bluffed forever."

The afternoon dragged itself slowly out, a misery of waiting. The sun's rays, almost horizontal, were shining through the western doorway when the crowd in the street parted to allow a vehicle to pass. Something in the hurried readiness of the natives to open a way brought the men to their feet in quick surprise. The trap turned in through the gates and, at a smart pace, whirled up the driveway. It stopped before the doors and Thérèse Simone stepped out.

"MADAME SIMONE!" Crewe exclaimed incredulously, as he hurried to meet her.

Thérèse took his outstretched hand, nodded to the other men, and quickly explained the reason for her coming.

"I chanced to learn their plans and came to warn you. They're going to attempt nothing until night. Then they are going to rush the house and try to take the president out. You've several hours yet—two or three anyway."

While she was speaking, a second figure slipped through the crowd and entered the forbidden gates. The quickness with which the watchers turned to peer at the man walking toward them showed how wire-taut were their nerves.

Blaine did not turn with the others. Instead, he walked over to Thérèse. "Why didn't you stay where you were safe?" he demanded in a concerned undertone. "You must know the danger here. Why did you come?"

Her eyes, as she smiled at her questioner, gave her real reason, but her lips framed another query. "And why did you?" Then she turned, and like the others, peered out at the approaching figure.

She smiled again, a different smile this time. There was no need for the pistol which Crewe had slipped from his pocket. As he came closer every one recognized the gaunt figure of the newcomer. It was Captain Enright, the remittance man.

There was something of defiant uncertainty in his bearing when he came into the room. He hesitated in the doorway, looking about, and made no attempt to conceal his surprise when he recognized Thérèse Simone. He bowed stiffly in her direction.

Her smile, when she returned his greeting, seemed to put him more at his ease. "I came to warn you," he said, turning to Crewe. "They are going to make a try for him tonight."

"So Madame Simone has just been telling us."

"If you want me," Enright offered diffidently, "I'll stay on until the show comes off. One more gun may be a help."

"I'd be more than grateful if you would, Jack." Crewe hesitated appreciably before the name, "Jack." The last time he had used it was a good many years in the past when, as boys, they had said good-by at the end of an Eton friendship, Enright to prepare for the army, Crewe for diplomacy. Here in Haiti, neither Crewe, the diplomat, nor Enright, the remittance man, had ever given a hint that their paths had crossed before.

Still standing near the door, Enright glanced outside. "Your trap, Madame Simone? Are you going back to your house, or are you staying on in this unhealthy locality? If you are staying, I'll take your pony out for you. No use asking whether any of the niggers are still about. They're all gone, I know."

"I'm staying," Thérèse answered, and turned to meet the protests which she knew would come from the men.

Crewe was the first to speak. "Oh, I say, this is very sporting of you, but we can't allow it. It's too dangerous. You really mustn't."

"Why not?" Thérèse questioned. "And please don't say it's because I'm a woman. That's no reason at all. I'm not going to have hysterics, and I think that possibly I can shoot as straight as any of you."

Crewe, thinking of his wife, who at the first suspicion of danger had locked herself in her room, frantic with panic, looked at her with unconcealed admiration.

Before any of the other men had an opportunity to protest further, she added: "I know how all of you feel. You think that, as men, you can't agree to let me share your danger. Well, I'm not going to give you the chance. I'm simply not going, and you will hardly put me in the street by main force; so there it is." Smiling, Thérèse looked at the members of the group in turn. "Now that we all agree on that, let's go on to something more important. I propose that we use some of the time we have fortifying ourselves with food and drink. What do you say?"

WITH the coming of darkness, all pretense at gaiety, which had been maintained through a stand-up meal, was abandoned. It had served its purpose. Night had come, and with it, its grimly serious possibilities. Doors were closed and bolted. Almost at once the heat became insupportable. Very quickly all the available firearms were apportioned and the six went upstairs to take up the posts which had been decided upon. Felix and Thérèse watched from a corner room which overlooked the grounds behind the house and the thickly planted stretch to the wall dividing the Legation compound and the palace garden.

At first they attempted to talk, but even their whispers boomed alarmingly loud to ears attuned to catch the least sound from the crowd which, with the coming of darkness, had become ominously silent.

Blaine had no idea how much time had passed when a whisper from Thérèse came to him through the blackness. "Felix, come over here. It's so cloudy that I can't see very well, but I think they are gathering on this side."

Side by side, his arm about her, they peered out into the night. "Yes, I think you are right. We must tell the others."

"Let me. I'd rather do it than stand here and watch," she explained as she felt her way to the door.

The mob moved restlessly about beyond the gates. Blaine could hear the shuffling of bare feet and low guarded voices, but strain his eyes as he might, he could see nothing but an indistinct, shifting black mass. Every detail was blotted out. Any minute now they would come. Already, possibly, the leaders were creeping through the shrubbery.

Thérèse came back and stood beside him, and again his arm went about her, holding her close. For a moment she left off watching and, turning, faced Felix. Her face was was only a white blur in the darkness, but her eyes were brilliant. "If this is the end, it's a better one than—" She stopped. "They're coming now. Kiss me, Felix."

He strained her close to him. Their lips met, and for one deliriously sweet moment the menace which hovered about them was forgotten. Then, very gently, she released his arms and turned again to the window.

There was a blinding flash, and the two instinctively stepped back. Another flash and another. With the lightning which flooded the scene outside with an eery, green-white glare, came the roar and crash of thunder. The house shook. Blinding rain, a swirling tropical torrent, beat down on palms that shrieked and groaned as the tearing wind stripped them bare, and tossed their broad leaves high into the air where they sailed and swooped like great black carrion birds, awaiting their prey.

Before the fury of the storm, the mob melted. In all directions, men and women ran, helter-skelter.

Unheard, Enright had come into the room and stood behind Felix and Thérèse. He laughed aloud and yelled against the din. "We might as well go downstairs and have a drink. No native can think of killing with cold water running down his back. As long as the storm lasts, they'll stay under cover."

A glance outside corroborated his words. There was no one in sight. The mob had dispersed and, for the moment, it was useless for the watchers to remain at their posts.

For an hour the storm raged. Then the rumbling of thunder grew distant and died away. The shrieks of the wind-tortured palms ceased. Reluctantly, the six remounted the stairs from the big central room where they had gathered.

Outside the sky was clear. The clouds had gone with the storm. The faint radiance of myriad low-hanging stars served only to intensify the blackness of the palm-shaded compound. Each shadow, darker than those surrounding it, became a native, creeping toward the house. Every twig which snapped outside twitched a nerve and conjured a picture of a slinking, clumsy-footed form. It demanded real courage and iron self-control to stand the suspense.

"I wish they'd come," Thérèse whispered across to Blaine. "Anything would be better than this. If I see one more imaginary native out there I'll shoot or scream, I don't know which. What are they waiting for? Why don't they come?"

But they did not come. Taut-nerved, the watchers stood at their posts. The east grew pink. An orange ball shot up from the horizon. Another day had come.

TIRED-EYED, and showing the strain of the last night, the six met once more in the big room downstairs.

"What do you think of it?" Crewe asked,

unconsciously turning to Enright and Madame Simone.

Enright replied. "I think it's all over. Yesterday they would have done anything; murdered the president and all of us along with him. Today's another day. When it comes to forgetting, the natives are exactly like their monkey ancestors."

"I'm inclined to agree with you, certainly to the extent of opening one of these doors. This heat is unbearable." He walked over and threw one open. "There, that's better." Standing in the open door, Crewe looked out at the empty street beyond the garden. "We are going to look nice if any of our frantic calls for aid went through. This town is as quiet now as a graveyard. What can we say if a ship comes in? Without seeing yesterday's insanity, nobody could possibly believe that there ever had been any danger. Let's trust none of the messages got through."

"If any did, the *Texylvania* is more than probably the ship that's coming. She's nearer than any of yours, I think," the American Minister said to the other two. "If my wire got through I imagine an answer has, too. I suppose I should go down and see."

"Let me go," Blaine said, getting to his feet. "You really don't look up to doing anything more. Bed is where you should be."

"I certainly would be obliged if you would. I'm not feeling too fit, now that you mention it."

On his way to the American Legation through the quiet streets that, the day before, had been bedlam, Blaine's thoughts were all of his problem—and Thérèse's. A ship meant escape, meant that they could get away before either he suffered the fate of Georges Simone, or Thérèse, drugged, offered the sacrifice. Never before in his life had he so passionately, desperately wished for anything.

As he turned into the straight street that led to the Legation and the pier beyond, he saw, far out, the gray outline of an incoming ship. With infinite relief, and something very like a prayer of thanksgiving, he recognized the *Texylvania*. Turning his pony, he started back.

Halfway there, a sound came to his ears which made him instinctively jerk his pony to his haunches, and as quickly spur him into a mad gallop, his one thought to get back to the Legation and to get there as quickly as his racing pony could do it. Every second counted. Never before had he heard the sound, but he knew it. It was the insane, bestial snarl of the mob that has scented blood.

The pony, on a dead run, rounded a corner into the narrow walled street behind the Legation, and into a screaming, weaving crush of natives. Every one was fighting and struggling to get to something which lay writhing on the ground outside the gate.

Blaine knew what this twitching, mangled thing was. It had been the president. The massacre in the jail was avenged. But this came as a second thought. His first was of the woman he had left inside. There was no possibility of getting through the press ahead. He must go around to the other gate. What had happened, what was happening, this second, inside?

FREE from the press at last, Blaine raced to the other gate. As he rode up to the house, his heart beat suffocatingly. What had transpired behind the closed doors ahead of him? Had Thérèse and the others shared the president's fate?

One of the doors opened an inch or more, was held so for a second, then thrown wide and Thérèse stepped out on the porch to meet him. Her face was chalky-white, her eyes full of sick protests at what they had been forced to witness. But her voice was steady when she spoke.

"They got him," was all she said.

In a second, Blaine was beside her.

"They were too intent on getting the president to think of us. We're all right, every one except the captain."

"Enright, is he hurt much?"

Without answering, Thérèse led the way inside. The room was a wreck. Chairs were overturned and smashed. The center table lay drunkenly on its side. Rugs askew showed plainly where a body had been dragged across them. Stretched on a couch in one corner was Enright.

In a flat monotone Thérèse told Blaine what had happened. "We were sitting here, Enright and I. The others were upstairs. With no warning, they were on the porch and crowding toward the one open door. Enright tried to close it ahead of them, and they shot him." For a moment she was silent and stood looking down at the dead man, whose uncovered face still held its defiant, cynical smile. "Maybe, after all, it was the best way out for him," she said quietly.

The two turned from the couch as Crewe and the others entered hurriedly. "Any message?"

Blaine nodded. "The *Texylvania* is coming in now."

"Thank God! A little longer and it would be too late. They're off now to find the president's spy who was responsible for the arrests of the people killed in the jail. Finished with him, they'll remember us and come back. We sheltered the president."

"I'm off," the American Minister said. "There's no time to be lost and I must go aboard the minute the ship drops anchor."

"But you'll never get through the streets alive now. The people are madmen again. You mustn't try it alone."

Already at the door the minister looked back. "It's my job," he said simply, "and yours to stay here with Madame Simone and Mrs. Crewe. Barricade yourselves, and I'll bring help as quickly as I can."

The watchers, now reduced to four, again began the heart-breaking wait. Which would they see first? Would a mob of racing natives or the bluejackets and marines be the first to turn into the street outside?

A half-hour passed. Three-quarters of an hour. It seemed an eternity. Had the minister succeeded in getting through the streets? Had the *Texylvania* yet cast anchor? The yells of the mob seemed to be nearer. If only there were something to do but wait! Inaction was becoming unbearable. With each leaden-footed minute the howling grew closer. Far down at the end of the street the leaders of the mob appeared.

"THEY'RE coming," Blaine called out to the others.

The warning had scarcely passed his lips when a stupefied quiet replaced the bedlam of sound outside.

The natives, torn between their lust for slaughter and an inbred fear of the foreigner, had stopped and stood staring. From the other end of the street, marines were advancing toward them.

Fear, inborn fear of the foreigner, won. Growling like a great beast cheated of its prey, the mob slunk away and rapidly disappeared.

For Thérèse and Felix, events moved quickly. On the heels of the first detachment of troops, landed to guard the Legation, came the minister and Captain Wilson of the *Texylvania*. A few words with the captain and it was arranged.

With the *Texylvania* in the harbor was a survey ship, the *Falcon*. In the afternoon the *Falcon* was to sail.

A half-hour before sunset, Thérèse and Felix, surrounded by a marine guard, drove for the last time through the town. Not a native was to be seen. All were in hiding, some in their houses, others already back in the bush.

As soon as they were aboard, the ship weighed anchor. In the stern, leaning side by side against the rail, they stood watching the island as it began to drop away. Beneath the light cape which fluttered from her shoulders Felix sought Thérèse's hand and found it. She smiled up into his eyes.

Faintly, from somewhere in the green and flame-red hills, came the sound of a beating tom-tom. The natives were talking, telling each other of the last, crowning disaster of the day. The white priestess was gone, gone at the moment when the knife was being whetted for the sacrifice of the Goat Without Horns.

Already miles away from Port au Prince and walking straight back into the bush, an old black woman stopped and listened to what the tom-toms were saying. Anger, defeat, and then overwhelming grief passed quickly accross her wrinkled face. Her shoulders drooped with utter dejection.

The tom-tom's message ended. For a moment she stood motionless. Then with a furious gesture she jerked a charm from around her neck and threw it far into the bush. Defiantly, she shook her fist at the secret meeting-place in the mountains ahead. Then she dropped down on the ground and, face down, lay there.

THE END

Adventures in Publicity

Lulu—She Steals the Show

Lil Old Milt Finds That There Is Such a Thing as Looking After One's Self Too Well

By Gayne Dexter

Illustration by Courtney Allen

HAVING forgone breakfast, Milton Glaze sat hungrily in a dilapidated armchair in the Hotel Tenelba lobby and scanned *Film Daily* without much hope that any company required a sure-fire, knock-'em-dead, thousand-per-cent-and-then-some exploitation man who grabbed ideas out of the ozone, whanged 'em over and turned flops into wows.

All of these was Milton Glaze, but midsummer, lying heavily upon Broadway, nullified his genius and humbled him almost to the level of one hundred other exploiteers who straggled from office to office, requesting first a job, then a loan, receiving neither. Not quite that far was the star-maker reduced. Pride sustained him. No piffling advertising manager would learn his poverty. As resources dwindled, his tongue clacked more brazenly of millions; but the motion-picture industry languished and Milt's place was regrettably in the sun. So he sat and read, filling internal voids with cigarette smoke until all of him was parched. He licked and chewed dry lips. When his eyes wandered toward the cigar stand where five-cent chocolate bars cajoled, he clung resolutely to the eighty-three cents in his pocket. He would be hungrier tonight.

To relieve emptiness he bent forward; thought dizzily and desperately of the injustice that gave fortunes to fools but abandoned the one real showman who could make stars, who could set Broadway scrambling for two-dollar tickets to a fifty-cent show, yet whose hunches, stunts, ideas now must wither as his body starved.

Dough, groaned Milt. Give him dough. Every one else had it; even this Dumb Juan from Dingville who looked like he'd been hung on a line for a coupla seasons until his legs and arms dangled out of clothes that had kinda crept up to meet their maker—yup, even he could stretch a simoleon across the cigar counter for a chocolate bar. One? Two. Three. *Six!* Get that, willya! One in his mouth, five in his jeans! And Milty hanging to the seat, like a star to her girlish laughter, just so's he wouldn't kill that rube for his candy!

At noon Glaze wavered out. Last season's straw hat slanted over his right eye, pearl-gray suit with bell-bottomed trousers, gray tie against mauve shirt and collar, constituted an admirable ensemble; but the hat furrowed a hot weal across his forehead, clothes were heavy, shirt unpleasantly saturated; and as he walked, restaurant odors tantalized and nauseated him.

A wilted acquaintance hailed him. "'Lo, Milty! Howza boy?"

"Don't see no undertakers measuring me, do you?" Glaze flipped back, unctuously patting his hat. He swelled prosperously for this press agent's envy. "Who you robbing now?"

"I'm out; been out two months. Things are dead."

"Where do you get that stuff—dead?" Glaze responded scornfully. "Course you're out. You've got what's coming to you for acting like things were dead when they're only taking their beauty sleep. Lookit! Every show running pitchers that's been lying on the shelf all winter and are only released now because companies think they must lose. Lotta bunk! That junk *drives* the mob to Coney."

"Sure! Summer's only a state of mind. So Adam said," the press agent retorted. "What are you doing about it, anyhow?"

Glaze waved a deprecating hand. "Say, listen, bo. Le' me tell you something. There's a big man waiting for me over at the Astor and when I get through putting him straight, the Coney concessions will have to move into Broadway or perish. Pipe these shows, willya! Sex stuff, costume plays, the old hokum that's been fed to the fans all year, only worse. They don't want it. No sirree. Novelty! And lil Milty's the guy to find it for them."

"Hunch?"

"Who does the infant industry wail for when it wants some food?"

A pause. Then the press agent: "Eating anywhere?"

Glaze glanced suspiciously, safeguarded his eighty-three cents. "Lunch date at the Astor," he said airily. "Gotta be trotting."

"So long," said the other. "I was going to ask you to have some chop-suey with me."

Uttering low moans, Milt strode valiantly into the Astor, but departed through the Forty-fifth Street exit. He made for Eighth Avenue, where a drug-store sandwich and a glass of water cost ten cents. Returning, he reëntered the hotel by the side door, loitered in the lobby, saluted men of film affairs whether they knew him or not, gazed wanly up the stairs which nobody invited him to climb. The millions glibly mentioned around him echoed in the pit of his stomach where the lone sandwich occupied so slight a space. He endured a long hour before Joseph Tobler, the president of Astral Pictures, and Harry A. Coombes, of Supernal, passed, deep in conversation. Thereupon Glaze followed immediately behind, but while Tobler and Coombes boarded a taxi, he dallied at the front door to adjust his hat and flick from knees the imaginary fluff of table linen. As the car moved away he waved good-by to no one at all.

Outwardly Milton Glaze had dined at the Astor not with one big man, but with two. Inwardly he paid for the lie.

FROM his exalted position at the top ot the steps, Glaze surveyed the sluggish crowd and was in turn gaped at by the Dumb Juan from Dingville whose figure gangled where the taxi had been. Between wide brown shoes and the ridiculous straw hive upon his head were distances of legs and body and shrunken alpaca gathering concertina-fashion behind knees and elbows. He seemed all creases. White cotton socks wrinkled over his ankles; inches of unironed shirt-sleeve engulfed each wrist; even his face, lengthening and shortening in mastication, for all its clean tan required laundering in a barber's chair. It was a face shaved, washed and worn without the refining influences of talc or toilet waters.

"And I'll bet where he comes from they think he's God's gift to women," scoffed Glaze, who for three days had noted this elongated individual around the Tenelba and wondered what brought him to a hotel of cheap vaudevillians and professional nonentities. But only this morning when the vulgar purchase of chocolate bars emphasized Milt's misery, had Glaze accorded him any emotional response. Now, chewing and staring, he further exasperated Milt who railed at the blind luck by which boobs are suckled.

Just a goof seeing the sights. Awrightee! Milt'd be one.

With demeanor as opulent as the Astor itself, he strutted toward the Tenelba. Tired theater-fronts challenged him. Red and black three-sheeters, "Closed for the Season. Will Reopen in September," were his own obituaries. Nor could he find inspiration in sky-high posters devoted mainly to soap. A knot of people before a novelty store aroused his curiosity. He shouldered through, out again disgustedly; for the window displayed no more than a pictured New Guinea warrior hideous with shell earrings and a shark-bone piercing his nostrils. Glaze damned the childishness of his people. Shortly he retraced his steps, however.

By count, sixty-seven stopped to look at the photograph within five minutes, while only three skimmed the adjoining window of screen stars' portraits, bathing girls and artistic beauties barely within the law.

"Novelty! Don't that show you?" muttered Milt.

"Show me what?" asked the Dumb Juan from Dingville, who stood beside him, hitherto unobserved.

Glaze glared at the munching jaws. "How did you butt in, anyhow?" he demanded. "Following me round like the mystery man in a serial."

"Have a chocolate? They're very nourishing."

"I s'pose down in Dingville every one wanders about chewing the cud."

The stranger blinked. "Where is Dingville?"

"Where you come from."

"Guess you're mistaking me for some one else," the other drawled, nervously inclined to grin. "I'm from Barton, Arkansas. Avery Judd. I used to keep the store there. You're Milton Glaze, aren't you? The desk clerk told me. Said you were in pictures, too, but I wouldn't believe him until I saw you come out of the Astor with Mr. Tobler."

Glaze suppressed a scathing retort. "Know Tobler?" he speculated.

"I wish I did. I've been trying to meet him for three days," Judd confessed and, fumbling in the region of his hip, produced a folded wad of paper that once was white. "I—I've written a scenario."

"All done by hand?" Milt inquired contemptuously.

"At first. But then I had it typewritten for two dollars."

"Why didn't you buy a shirt instead?" A nifty, thought Glaze. Aw, summer made him stoopid, wasting nifties on a guy from Arkansas.

Avery Judd replied thoughtfully, "I kept out twenty when I sold my store."

"You're pleased to meet me," beamed Milton, suddenly enfolding the other's arm in a clasp of brotherly love. He steered him toward the Tenelba. Broadway strummed again beneath his soles, glad-heartedly buffeting him; and what window did not beguile with stacked cantaloupes and garnished roasts, or promise cool comfort of buff, green, stippled mohair in vain models for spiffy dressers? For Milt was hungry and hot and Avery Judd had written a scenario and sold his store.

FROM his father Avery had inherited the cans, cases, barrels, the hanging and leaning things, the credits, good-will, old-style advertising cuts that maintained Barton's most progressive emporium; but the bequest entailed little thrill. Avery's first steps were toddled with the counter as support; his slates and school books, his attire through childhood, adolescence and manhood, in fact, all of him originated within this store. Proprietorship meant no more than withdrawing from the till each week one hundred dollars or so instead of the fifteen Old Man Judd had allowed. That and freedom for artistic impulses which were outcroppings of his father's pioneer spirit. He had visions unbordered by shelves; he cherished them against public prediction that the defunct Judd would writhe in his grave did he know how hard it was to get a yard of elastic at the store these days.

Meanwhile Avery, seeking inspiration in advertisements, refused to be detective, railroad traffic-inspector, hypnotist or correspondence-school ukulele-player. He commenced to "copy this sketch," and had penciled a quivering outline of Uncle Sam before rival arts, diverting him, saved the fortune of Briggs, Fontaine Fox and Sidney Smith.

He wrote the words for a song. Two or three of them were actually used in the lyric to which a New York firm set music, charging one hundred and seventy-five dollars for professional fees and publication costs. They sent him two hundred complimentary sheets, many reasons why he should continue to express his genius thus, and an elaborate contract awarding him three cents royalty on every sold copy. The only sale was that which Avery made between a packet of hairpins for Mrs. McPherson and Lesson XII in scenario writing.

What Milton Glaze first derided, now possessed, as he drew two chairs confidentially close, was Avery's graduating screen play, marked with honors by the professorial board.

"Soon as I seen you, I knew you were in the profession but thought you were only a character man," quoth Milt affably.

"That's why I joshed you down the street. A guy like me can't be too careful about actors he's seen round with. First thing you know they're using my name to get jobs, saying I'll boost whatever fillum they're in. Scenario writers are different. They've got standing. . . . Lemme see now—what was it you wrote last? Not 'The Covered Wagon,' not 'The Sea Hawk'! I'll remember in a minute. Had a Broadway run, didn't it?"

"No. This is my first," Avery admitted hesitantly.

A doubt momentarily clouded Milt's face. "Well, we all have to start somewheres," he said generously; then unfolded sheets and pretended to read. Judd, who stumbled out a word of explanation, but was silenced, awaited the verdict with pathetic hope. "H'm-m. A Western. Two-Gun Turner oughta be interested in this if you knew how to approach him. He's one of Astral's stars."

"That's why I've been trying to meet Mr. Tobler," stammered Avery.

"Tobler's all right, but upstage unless you're a friend of his. Me, I'd only have to buzz him and say, 'Joe, here's a story made to order for Two-Gun,' and he'd write out a check for five thousand on my say-so, or maybe seven thousand if I'd exploit the pitcher afterwards."

"Would you do that for me? It's a lot to ask, but I'd be glad to pay." Avery's drawl was lost in half-shy eagerness.

"Depends on how much."

"My scenario course said to pay ten per cent commission. That would be at least five hundred dollars after it's sold."

Glaze felt robbed by the robbers of Avery Judd; they were conscientious depredators who educated their victims against later piracy. It didn't seem fair. Although he schemed swiftly, he detected in Avery's eyes, deeper than zeal, a stubborn faith in Lesson XX—"How and Where to Sell Scenarios." It would persist against all eloquence: that even originals by famous authors were difficult to dispose of; that companies returned amateur offerings unread unless backed by influence, and influence was worth fifty dollars cash in advance. Milt saved his breath. The script grew baleful in his hands. Ten per cent after it was sold. Ten per cent of nothing.

He'd get this tightwad for a dinner, though.

"Offhand I can't tell you whether it's worth my while to handle," he said. "Just looking at you I'd figure you've got the scenario writer's style, and maybe I might want to develop you. But when producers expect me to juggle up new ideas, stars and star-authors who'll be dragging down thousands a week inside a year—well, when they got that much confidence in me, I can't afford to put my O.K. on a lemon. Heard of Charles Dickens, huh? He's just one I brought into the game. Course he's dead now, played out; but way back I boosted his stuff and boosted it, and if it hadn't been for me they'd never of made 'Ivanhoe' or 'The Hound of the Baskervilles.' So when you stand that strong—Tell you what, I'll read your story for high lights this afternoon; then when I take dinner with you tonight, I'll give you a yes or no. Howzat for a proposition?"

STRETCHED full-length on his bed, shoes starting new holes in the threadbare counterpane, coat thrown across a rickety chair, collar and tie hooped over the mirror, Glaze punctuated Avery's scenario with brittle laughter. It was worse than he had expected. At last, rising wearily, he crossed to the window and groaned to Broadway far down through the heat's shimmering screen:

"You're gasping for novelty, so listen to this: Harry Jones is foreman of a Texas ranch. He loves Mabel Smith, the owner's beautiful daughter. Tom Dolan, the black-hearted cowboy, kidnaps her and just as he's gonna brand her, Harry horns in to the rescue. And it's called 'The Cowboy's Revenge.' Read it and weep."

Hunger welling, he flung himself on the bed again, buried his face in the pillow and jeered—not at Judd, but at himself for overlooking the potential millions of scenario schools. "And I'm the wise guy that thinks he knows all the tricks," Glaze almost sobbed. "Avery paid those sharpshooters two hundred bucks. What a monkey it makes of me! 'The Cowboy's Revenge.' So old it's—"

Suddenly he rolled over and, squatting with knees gathered to his chin, repeated, "So old it's new," as if alarmed at the dawning idea.

HE fairly dashed into coat, collar and tie, stood undecided in the center of the room. "Now, Milty, le's see," he muttered, urging and cautioning himself. "Right outa the ozone! Take it easy, kid. He's sold his store, but— He's *got* to! He's *got* to! If only I had the dough to swing this myself! . . . Now, where was that ad?"

Variety and the *Billboard* lay discarded in the waste-basket. He retrieved them, hurried through the pages, then went out. The small crowd that still preferred undraped ugliness of the New Guinea native to feminine pulchritude equally revealed, buttressed him. An hour was spent in a shed behind a Ninth Avenue tenement; two more in a grubby projection room where he viewed reel after reel of motion-picture antiques. At both places he haggled, perspired, was victorious. Once more in the Tenelba lobby he strode importantly, informed the telephone operator that his extension threatened to burst with business during the next few weeks, but if she gave him attention—well, she knew Milty was a pretty good spender when he had it, and before moving out of this stable over to his new suite at the Astor—well, Milty was not the sort of guy to forget. On sheets of hotel note paper he figured tens, hundreds, thousands; wrote specimen contracts; lettered titles and held them off, envisaging each cipher in electric lights.

Figures enticed again. Four thousand dollars, including two hundred a week for himself. He prayed that Judd had that much, but doubt, incipient then, tormented him all through dinner with Avery. Glaze evaded all questions until the check was paid. Then he leaned back and treated a corona-corona with five-cent disdain. Avery, nervous in hope, gulped ice-water; his anguished expectation awed Milt, who groped vainly for a less devastating prelude, yet knew destruction must be sudden and painful.

"Your scenario's rotten," he announced.

Judd blinked as if he had not heard aright.

"Absolutely rotten!" Glaze repeated, and rejoiced as despair banished incredulity from Avery's face.

"But—but—"

"Don't argue. You're getting the truth. I promised to tell you straight. If you want to be a scenario writer you'd better start figuring how long your money will last on Broadway at, say, a hundred a week. A month or a year?"

"A year," Judd announced almost without volition.

Glaze exhaled relief in a long puff of smoke, behind which he grew benign. "I like to spring the bad news first. It's what the show business is built on. Give 'em a sob, then a laugh. Now snap out of your gloom, Ave. Your story's so punk it's a clean-up."

"You mean clean up the— What is a clean-up?"

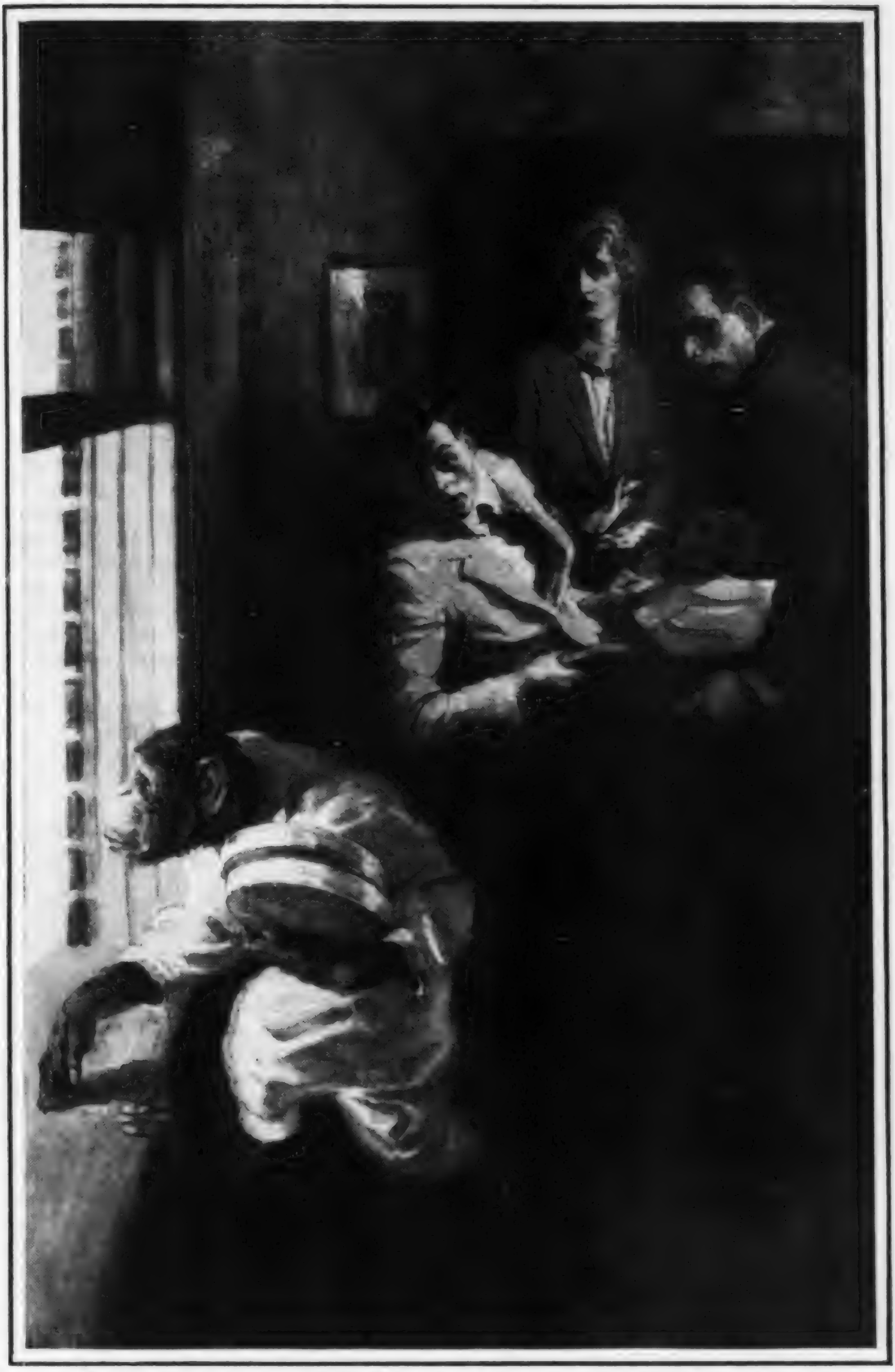
"A clean-up's a pitcher you take into a tank-town, play Monday to Sat'day and make so much jack that on Sunday the parsons perish."

JUDD looked as sorry for the clergy as for himself.

"I like you, Ave. You're a game guy. So I don't want you to be steered wrong. In the pitcher game a man's a bum actor today and a three-thousand-dollar-a-week director tomorrow. We all belong somewheres," Milt proceeded, and to Avery his eyes encroached farther than his body bent across the table. "Nix on 'Scenario by Avery Judd,' crowded on one credit title with the assistant director, camera man and 'costumes by.' When I'm behind you, you're too big for that. Know who you are? You're 'Avery Judd presents': a producer; the first from Barton, Arkansas; from store to Starry Way. And who put you there? Who's gonna turn your five thousand bucks into twenty thousand? Who's gonna make Avery Judd so famous that Congress passes a resolution of sympathy every time grapefruit squirts in his eye? Milty. Lil Milty. Your money, my brains; your scenario, my showmanship. Hunches, stunts, ideas! That's me!"

Avery was struggling from abasement. "You mean produce my own scenario?"

"Yup—but my way. Kinegraph made 'The Cowboy's Revenge' as a one-reeler in 1909 and it's been fillumed a thousand times since. This afternoon, though, I got the original negative. A freak! A wow! The drama's comedy; when the villain jumps over a cliff you can see the straw falling outa his clothes. Now lemme ask you something. Who's the biggest money-maker at the box-office today? Lulu Fitzhue. Am I



Gaining the window in two bounds, Lulu seized a water pipe and swung herself beyond reach of the frantic person who by his conduct shocked her feminine sensibilities.

right? Well, in this pitcher here's Lulu emoting all over the place in cowgirl scenery, riding bronc's, rolling her eyes like cart-wheels, weeping great blobs of glycerine—oh, boy, a knock-out! She'd die if she seen it today. So what do we do? Cash in on it. First we buy this old negative; then we make a one-reeler of your scenario; run 'em together and change 'The Cowboy's Revenge' to 'Won't Lulu Love It?' and—"

"But why should Lulu love it?" Judd puzzled, several reels behind.

"I was waiting for that." Glaze laughed. "That's the punch. When you see the star I've booked to play Lulu's part in your story, you'll say, 'Milty, compared with you there's a Barnum born every minute.' C'mon. Le's go!"

Avery went, in a taxicab and a state of bewilderment. Ninth Avenue crawled past, its windows framing uncertain silhouettes, its fire-escapes draped with bedding, humid lassitude over all. The tenement they entered reeked of fried things and broiled people; a single gas jet flickered far down a dim hall, its light soon lost as they trudged up stairs and stairs.

"THIS is a terrible place," Avery panted, near the topmost landing.

"Year from now you'd be writing your scenarios in this dump if you hadn't of met me," Glaze assured him. "Lulu lives here."

"Not Lulu Fitzhue?"

When Milt knocked at a door, Avery expected a crone to challenge them. Instead appeared a girl, sunnily golden and pink against the drab living-room behind, young at first glance, on closer scrutiny still young but heavy-eyed as one who has worked more years than she has lived.

"Evening, Miss Vincent," Glaze greeted. "Maisie Vincent—Avery Judd. I've brought Mr. Judd around to see Lulu. Is she dressed yet?"

"Sit down and I'll tell her you're calling."

She vanished down a corridor, leaving Avery to stare on shabby walls, Glaze to poke about the room, chuckling: "Wait till you see Lulu. A beaut! Hang on to your heart."

"Do—do stars really come from places like this?" Judd wondered.

"Bo, if all the stars built mansions on their birthplaces, the only slums in New York 'd be Riverside Drive and Park Avenue. The pitchers make millionaires outa store clerks and pikers outa sub-debs. That's why they're big. Of the people, by the people, for the people. George Washington said a mouthful. The little lady you're gonna meet tonight is worth twenty thousand dollars to you on just one fillum. And you can buy her for five hundred iron men."

"*Buy* Lulu!"

"*Sh-h!* Pipe down!"

STEPS sounded outside. Avery, at the door, caught a glimpse of broad sombrero and flaxen curls, red shirt opened at the throat, and a short buckskin riding skirt brass-studded in the fancy of the motion-picture West. Lulu had dressed for the part. Standing there, she ogled him through round brown eyes, until his first awkwardness became an impulse of flight; and when Lulu, springing lightly on the table, reached for him with affectionate arms, stupefaction on his part permitted no response.

"Some vamp!" laughed Glaze. From him to Maisie Vincent, who had also entered, finally to Lulu, Avery flung astounded glances.

For Lulu was a chimpanzee.

Her gaze fell upon his gold watch-chain. She snatched at it, startling him into retreat.

"Lulu, stop!" Maisie called.

Instantly the chimpanzee recoiled, but being feminine, repulsed and rebuked, she huddled and waved her arms in lamentation over the table. Her mouth drooped, she sniffled, then sobbed ridiculously until tears swept her black cheeks. Wiping her eyes, Lulu encountered her hat. Off came the sombrero and the grotesque curls fastened beneath the brim. She cast all down and flung herself upon the crown, beating it flat. Mollified then, she bounced into a rocking-chair, from her skirt pocket produced powder puff and vanity mirror and daubed her wet face white.

"Lulu is a thief," Maisie explained. "She wants everything that shines and if she can't have it she tries hysterics. It used to be the big laugh in Dad's act."

"In pictures?" Judd asked feebly.

Glaze fitted his thumbs under his armpits. "You betcha! You put her in. Get the idea now? First we have Lulu Fitzhue's old reel; then in your scenario, which is the same story, the chimp plays her part, doing everything she did. It'll be the greatest comedy novelty Broadway ever heard of. And they'll come a-running. 'Won't Lulu Love It?' Featuring Lulu Fitzhue and Lulu, the Perfect Lady. Howzat hit you?"

"Not a monkey in my scenario!" Judd protested.

"Forget you ever thought of being a scenario writer. You're a producer."

"But it isn't fair to Lulu Fitzhue."

"All I got to do is to show her the human angle. Avery Judd inherits a store in Arkansas. Maisie Vincent inherits a trained chimp in Ninth Avenue. Fate brings 'em together and they knock the million-dollar producers for a row of caraway seeds. Lulu's heart's the size of a house. She'll see the joke. Great publicity story, too."

"But will she? If I were in her position—"

"Leave that to me, I tell you," Glaze interposed. "We can make this in two weeks. Pay Maisie here five hundred dollars for the chimp. I draw two hundred a week and a half-share for supervising production, exploitation and making contracts with the distributors. We'll crash Broadway inside a month—the pitcher houses will go crazy to book it. Then Do-re-mi! You with twenty thousand, me with twenty thousand and little Maisie here with enough to live somewhere decent instead of this hutch. You're giving her a chance, Ave. That's the finest thing a man can do for a woman."

Avery's eyes met the girl's, then darted away.

Intent upon Judd's chain again, Lulu, the Perfect Lady, ambled from the chair, but checked by Maisie's, "Now, Lulu," she pawed his coat, wondering at the bulge in his pocket. All innocently she peered into his face, but her fingers searched. He pretended not to notice. Lulu cautiously extracted a chocolate bar but betrayed herself with delighted gurgles at its brilliant silver wrapper.

"Little gold-digger!" he grinned.

"Dad taught her terrible things," Maisie smiled wistfully. "He, Lulu and I were in the act together. Vaudeville and tent shows. But after Dad went, the work was too heavy for me, so I advertised Lulu for sale. Only—she's— Mr. Judd, did you ever own a dog?" And now there was no smile.

"Had an Airedale."

Coming beside the chimpanzee, she scratched the old pate. "That's how it is with Lulu and me," Maisie said ruefully.

"Your father left you nothing else?" Avery found himself asking.

She shook her head. Glaze rubbed his finger tips. He felt somewhat out of touch.

"And honestly—you want to sell?" Avery continued doubtfully.

"What's wrong with that?" Glaze put in. "You sold your father's store."

"It wasn't a living thing. . . . Why are you letting Lulu go, Miss Vincent?"

"So that she'll be certain of enough to eat."

AVERY surveyed the room very slowly, its dinginess full upon him; and from this background emerged girl and chimpanzee in outrageous contrast. Neither belonged here.

"Besides," admitted Maisie, who divined his glance, "five hundred dollars seems a lot of money when you live—here."

"S'pose so," he muttered. "I don't want to buy Lulu, though."

"Don't what!" Glaze growled. But Judd was too large to slay.

The girl drew herself up. "I—I think I'm glad."

"Trouble is, I wouldn't know what to do with her afterward," Avery drawled, rubbing his chin. "Maybe you'd let me hire Lulu for the same figure."

Understanding that more the condition of Maisie than his own blandishments won, Glaze despised Avery, who could listen to an idea grander than Barnum ever imagined, yet assent only under the hypnotism of a circus girl's distress. Pretty soft for Ave; pretty soft, he'd say. Nothing to do but grow rich on Milty's brains. Huh! Pipe the Two Orphans.

"Snap out of it. Get some ink and paper, willya, Maisie, and take Lulu back to the shed. . . . Thanks. . . . Now this is between me and you, Ave. Deed of partnership."

With Judd at his elbow, he commenced:

Whereas, Avery Judd and Milton Glaze have this day agreed to enter into the business of motion-picture production; and
Whereas, the said Avery Judd is—

"Leave out the whereases. They mix me up."

"What's wrong with you? When Tobler of Astral has confidence in me, where do you get off suggesting I'm gonna rob you?" Glaze bantered. "Aw-rightee. You try one."

Avery did. After much thought, he wrote:

> Avery Judd hereby agrees to finance Milton Glaze up to four thousand dollars ($4,000) to produce a picture called 'Won't Lulu Love It?' and to divide with him fifty-fifty on the finished film. It is agreed that during the production Maisie Vincent will receive one hundred and fifty dollars ($150) as trainer of Lulu, the chimpanzee. All releasing contracts are to be made in the name of Avery Judd.

"Would something like that be enough?" Avery inquired.

"Enough? That's a plenty. Sorta sad about Maisie, ain't it?"

CAMERAS revealed only external distinctions between Lulu Fitzhue and Lulu, the Perfect Lady. As one had laughed, cried, ranted through impossible emotions fifteen years before, so the other performed with simian variations during sixteen studio days; but what the public would ridicule in the woman as shocking art, it would glorify in the chimpanzee as a histrionic accomplishment.

Glaze supervised, directed, chose locations, ordered Avery from every set and adorned himself in riding trousers and leggings that had moldered in a director's clothespress. He regarded Judd as an encumbrance, Maisie as a necessary evil; for the chimpanzee obeyed no one else. Moreover, Maisie's capabilities annoyed him. She discovered impromptu gags richer in laughter than his best; she checked the expense sheets he presented to Judd; she smiled the laboratory staff into extra effort after his exhortations had caused open hostility.

Being a producer brought Avery no greater glory than to litter the side-lines; between sequences to be searched by Lulu for chocolate bars; to keep track of pistols, handcuffs and other properties whose glitter led Lulu to theft.

He despaired at his dwindling bank balance. Dollars marched to carnage; not even the wounded returned. Only when he stood beside Maisie on the Fort Lee ferry, coming home, was there consolation; for sunset rolled over the Palisades and enwrapped New York until he imagined the city had minted its gold to paint its face; that he had but to wave to bestow all this upon the tired girl. Gold, too, was the river toward New Jersey, in floating patches seen distantly, soon gone as if tides carried the treasure to sea.

"You never knew that money could go so fast, did you, boy?" whispered Maisie. "Don't worry. It'll all come back."

His grasp tightened upon her hand. It frequently did. Since when, he could not recall; so chaotic was Avery Judd. "I don't mind the gamble, but I'm thinking of what will happen to—" He hesitated, finally compromised, "—if we don't win."

"You will," returned Maisie confidently. "Perhaps I'm new to movies but to audiences I'm old. And what we are producing is audience stuff."

"You and Glaze are doing it all. I feel useless."

The breeze curled a wisp of hair roguishly across her forehead. "You're learning—learning to spend; but if you want to ease your mind, try a tailor. The more clothes you have, the more money you think you have; and Broadway bows down and worships a mental millionaire. You'd own the earth in a tuxedo."

THE presidential suite of Astral Pictures, where carpets, chairs and schemes were deep, dwarfed Joseph Tobler, who listened while his secretary read reports from the Astral reviewing staff upon an unknown comedy, "Won't Lulu Love It?" offered for distribution by producers equally unknown. The more he heard, the more he marveled that two thousand feet of celluloid could arouse his cynics to superlatives. He rang for the Director of Publicity, squinted fierily at him through thick glasses.

"I want you should tell me about 'Won't Lulu Love Him?' Who produced it, and why don't you loafers in the publicity department get such ideas instead of I should pay seventy per cent of the gross to somebody I don't know if I want Supernal or Schlitz should not have it?"

The other shrugged. "It's just one of those things. Crazy Glaze dug up some one foolish enough to back a wild idea. They played in luck, landed a winner. And before you start knocking my department, remember when you come back from Europe six months ago you made me fire Glaze for telling the ship-news reporters you were going to marry a Russian Princess, and—"

Anger blazed in Tobler's face. "That fellow! That fellow Glaze! My wife would not speak by me for weeks afterwards!"

"And Avery Judd, the angel, is that correspondence-school scenario writer who camped in the lobby for three days trying to see you."

"Scenario writer? I thought he was a process server. I ask you, ain't I fool, I ask you. But if you say 'Yes' you don't have no more job by me." Then to his secretary: "Miss, when you done making dates with sheiks out of my window, miss, maybe you don't mind ringing up these Glaze and Judd they should see me this afternoon at three o'clock. Then tell the operator to run 'Ain't Lulu Lovely?' for me. Maybe it ain't such a much. Glaze! *Phooey!* Wrecks my home!"

AT three o'clock Milton lounged into Tobler's office, positive that the industry must recognize one leader among all showmen, when many box-offices extolled him with rustle of paper money and chink of coin. Avery perched. Wrinkled and remote beyond a glass-topped table, sat Tobler. His attitude, inquiring the reason for their visit, mystified Judd, assured Glaze who remarked:

"So you like my pitcher, Mr. Tobler?"

"I like it worth two thousand dollars of my money," said Tobler, outlining the figure with a paper-knife.

"Not so bad," replied Glaze complacently. "Two thousand dollars means more to you than forty thousand to Supernal."

"Forty thousand for a two-reel comedy! You know some more funny stories?"

"Yup. The Crystal Palace, your Broadway house, has a weekly overhead of fifteen thousand and your receipts are down to half that. . . . Why don't you laugh? Every one else does."

"An Irisher joke. Like me engaged to a Russian princess. I remember you!"

"I am sorta hard to forget," Glaze agreed, glancing at the clock. "Now listen. We're due at Supernal in half an hour. Don't want to go, because that outfit's full of never-wasers. But it's forty thousand or nothing. Tell you what you do. Put 'Won't Lulu Love It?' into the Crystal Palace week from Sunday. I'll get behind the pitcher, and you know me. Stunts, ballyhoos, personal appearances of the chimp, lined up already. If I boost your receipts to thirty thousand for the week, that's twenty-two thousand more than you've been drawing. So to clear us you only need eighteen thousand from U. S. and the rest of the world, whereas, properly handled, it'll gross quarter of a million. If it don't make good at the Crystal we'll shade our price. Howzat for a proposition?"

For a long time Tobler pondered, his mind far from the present business, rankling around frenzied weeks when the Tobler home had been rent by wifely accusations and his pleas that the Russian princess lived only in a press agent's imagination. Even now he doubted that Rheba trusted him. Chewing his thumb-nail, he glowered at the author of tearful days, who demanded:

"Well, what about it?"

"All right by me," Tobler answered, suddenly serene.

"Put it on paper. Make the agreement with Judd. So foxy the hot-dogs bark at him," muttered Milt to Avery as they departed. "Smeared it all over him, didn't I, huh?"

LULU, the Perfect Lady, made a newsless week uproarious. Garbed in an orange bathing-suit, she paraded behind the Coney Island Beach Beauties and received six ice-cream cones as consolation prize. Spectators thought Lulu should have won. And so did Lulu. Spying the silver cup the champion beauty held, she swooped upon it and decamped, with Maisie Vincent, news photographers and the outraged winner in pursuit. Papers starred the story. Glaze pounded Avery's back with enthusiasm.

"There's our slogan: 'Lulu—She Steals the Show!' "

Overnight that line and the crude impression of a chimpanzee's paw teased New

York from one-sheet posters on walls, fences, wherever paste could cling, snipers reach.

And Lulu did her utmost.

She led the Ball-Ground Band successfully until a shining cornet overwhelmed her. From the grand-stand roof she tootled it; a home-run passed unnoticed. Two thousand children thronged Wimpel's toy department to be entertained. They were. For Lulu fled with a tin helmet, and when the genial store detective dragged her to the police station on shop-lifting charges, roundsmen rejoiced to write of how the desk sergeant nearly lost his badge. All that glittered, Lulu appropriated spectacularly.

To small hours a light burned in the newly rented office on Broadway where Glaze measured yards and yards of press clippings. Wearily he strode, smoked, shed collar and tie and goaded his brain to the ultimate idea. One more theft, outstanding but jocular. A public statue—cart it away and blame the chimp? Too wild. All the pawnshop balls on Sixth Avenue? Take too long. And risky. He searched inspiration in the waning street; it offered a jeweler's window, gleaming behind iron gates. He paused in sudden hope.

"Gee! If I only had the nerve!"

WHAT else could a monkey steal? Overhearing the question, a policeman shadowed him to Columbus Circle, down Fifth Avenue to Thirty-fourth Street and back along Broadway, until Milt sat upon a restaurant garbage can and invoked the law itself.

"What else could a monkey steal?" the policeman repeated suspiciously. "What monkey?"

"Lulu."

"Cuckoo!"

"No, Lulu."

"Never heard of her," said the policeman.

"S'pose you live in Brooklyn," Glaze sighed.

But this official ignorance belittled his achievements. More than ever there must be one wow, one allez-oop, that would pierce Brooklyn and even Bronx fastnesses. He drifted back to the office and emerged with bucket and brush; then proceeding stealthily, performed mysterious rites before several Fifth Avenue stores. At daybreak sidewalks would bear whitewashed stencils of a simian paw and the slogan, slightly varied:

> Lulu called! Look out! She'll
> Steal your show!

Fair, thought Milt, disrobing limply. Yup, fair enough; but not the super-stunt. . . . Tired. Kinda strung out. Still, the old pan ud come through with just one more. Then twenty thousand from Joe Tobler. He'd learn that punk to fire the livest publicity man in the game. Twenty thousand for Judd, too. Just another guy milking Milty. Now lookit tonight. While he plugged, Ave was out somewhere with Maisie. Aw-rightee. That cabaret hound from Arkansas ud learn, too. Fifty-fifty on the finished film. *Some* joker contract if Milt liked to start anything. . . . Le's see. This was Friday. Open Sunday. Two days for a knock-out hunch. Sweet angels, whisper while he slept!

But Glaze was too weary for dreams. At noon the telephone bell awakened him; he answered vaguely and understood that Avery desired him at the office. Milt would be there—sometime. Slipping a pad into the bell against further disturbance, he returned to bed.

Hours afterward, refreshed and jaunty, he arrived with morning and evening newspapers under his arm. Maisie, who stared through the window, ignored him. The chimpanzee was snoring in a corner by the safe.

"Ah, there, Maisie! Glad you brought Lulu down. I'll need her for the best thing ever pulled off on Broadway. Don't know what it'll be yet, but"—tapping his forehead—"the incubator's working. Never failed yet. . . . Where's Ave? You two getting along nicely together, huh? Pretty soft. I make him rich, you grab him off. Milton Glaze, the gold-digger's patron saint." He sneered at the storm gathering in the girl's face. "Why don't you pick a live one like me? Where's Judd, anyhow?"

"Out!" said Maisie, repressing herself.

Glaze glanced around the office, as if discovering Avery's absence. "Well, what do you know about that!" Seating himself, he red-penciled in each paper the space that Lulu won.

Gray of face, Avery came in.

"Too much wild life. Better cut it out," Glaze scoffed. He pointed to the journals. "We got a nice break today."

Judd emitted a hollow sound. "We did. We're broke!"

"We're what?" Milt's head shot up.

"The picture can't go on." With trembling fingers he extended a folded sheet. "That's why I wanted you this morning. Lulu Fitzhue has taken out an injunction to restrain Astral from distributing or exhibiting 'Won't Lulu Love It?' on the ground that it holds her up to public ridicule and impairs her status as a star. That's a copy of the injunction Astral sent me."

Glaze snatched the document. Twenty thousand dollars dwindled as he read. Silence, muffling the chimpanzee's low snores and Broadway's din, tightened about him. But ink took tongue and jeered from every printed word. The day's stories proudly displayed; yesterday's and all previous days' in bulging press-books or gummed to the walls as trophies; in the typewriter a half-composed eulogy of himself for trade-paper publications; the jazzy ads, "business" for Lulu's personal appearances; the speech he would deliver at a press luncheon he had intended to award himself, signalizing his entry into the production field—all gibbered at him. A poster cried, "Lulu—She Steals the Show!" The whitewash bucket shot pains into his joints; his back ached from stooping, his arms were lame from brushing stencils on Fifth Avenue.

He wanted to crumple and sleep—here, anywhere, preferably on a railroad track.

"Well, what did you do?" he snapped, arousing himself. "See Tobler?"

"No. I had a few minutes with Miss Fitzhue at the station before she left for Hollywood, trying to persuade her to withdraw the injunction and give us a chance. She pretended she knew nothing about it, but said we were making a laughing-stock of her, that the whole thing wasn't fair. I guess she's right," Avery added regretfully.

"Right!" bellowed Glaze. "Didn't she do the first pitcher? Wasn't she paid for it? Didn't she think it the finest fillum in the world when she made it?" He approached furiously and leered into Judd's face. "You're gonna let her get away with it?"

Avery rose above him. "We were trying to get away with something," he corrected in a tone sterner than Glaze had heard before. "If Miss Fitzhue says it hurts, I guess I'll lose my four thousand."

"And gyp me outa my twenty thousand! You let me work, sell you the hunch, produce the pitcher, put it over, slog myself to death day and night for one more smash. Then what do I get? Little Willie stuff. Lulu doesn't like it!" Glaze swung away, clearing the table at one sweep. He plowed through the débris, mouthed impotently at the Crystal Palace opposite. By and by he flung over his shoulder, "S'pose we'd better dissolve partnership."

Avery nodded; whereupon Glaze took from the office safe four flat circular cans of film, verified their contents, closed them again, stacked all upon the table. Producing his agreement, he read aloud: "Avery Judd hereby agrees to finance Milton Glaze up to four thousand dollars to produce a pitcher called 'Won't Lulu Love It?' and to divide with him fifty-fifty on the finished fillum.' . . . Here's the finished fillum, ain't it? That's all we got." He pushed two cans to Avery, retained two for himself and placed these on the safe behind him. "Fifty-fifty. Satisfied?"

"Yes."

"Maisie, you witnessed our agreement and you heard what Judd just said?"

"Yes," she answered, puzzled.

"Then we're all through, Ave? No legal complications? Everything jake and gentlemanly?"

"Yes."

A SMILE distorted Glaze's lips. "Now, you poor sap, I'll tell you something," he exulted. "All you've got is the positive fillum, that's shown on the screen. Even if you wanted to run it, six weeks' wear ud cut it to ribbons. Then you'd have nothing left. But me, I got the negative. I can make a hundred prints from it. And I'm gonna. That injunction only stands for New York. Tonight I'm heading out. I'll jump from state to state and town to town so fast Lulu Fitzhue won't even see my dust. Selling this to the fly-by-nighters, I'll clean up thirty thousand before she has time to plaster me with forty-eight injunctions. Even then there's Canada and Mexico, and half an hour from now I'll have foreign rights sold for ten thousand easy as kiss my hand. All mine—not a bean for you—because I'm a fighter from way back and you're a flamin' quitter."

He reveled in the wreck of Avery Judd.

Lulu awakened, yawned and desired excitement. Seeing bright objects upon the safe just above her head, she gauged the distance from there to the open window. Very cautiously she reached.

Glaze wheeled. Lulu leaped. Gaining the window in two bounds, she seized a water pipe and swung herself beyond reach of the frantic person who clutched at her, swore, prayed, shouted and by his conduct shocked her feminine sensibilities. It was no place for a lady.

Hugging the two cans of negative, she clambered lower and hung dizzily until Broadway's upturned, marveling faces provoked an ancient memory. It occurred to Lulu that such things had been observed hitherto in an upside-down condition from a high trapeze. Here a flagpole jutted horizontally. Soon she occupied the far end, midair and breathless attention.

And Lulu was a circus girl.

SOME of the old tricks! Catherine-wheels, seven times around the bar, hanging by one foot. High-wire work, including shimmy and Argentine tango *pas seul* ("One hundred feet above the earth, ladeez and gen'men. Measure it yourself!") Plastic poses: Psyche at the Well, Diana the Huntress, Venus de Milo, Mercury in bronze. (*Boom-ta-ra-ra-boom.*) Life in the old girl yet!

Lulu's transports differed from Milt's delirium.

Hanging head downward, she applauded herself. The film containers crashed together as cymbals; a lid flew off; but, catching the reel before it fell, Lulu righted herself and imagined a new shape in chocolate bars. The celluloid was bitter in her mouth. She hurled it away. The film unwound in midair, spiraling down to Broadway, where street-cars, automobiles and many feet destroyed it. Still, Lulu enjoyed its passage. The second reel tasted no better but its flight was more fantastic. Then, finding nothing else to do, she climbed back to the window, where Avery beckoned with a genuine chocolate-bar.

Milton Glaze claimed no credit for the superstunt. He hid from reporters, who obtained the story from Avery nevertheless. Nor did he glory that one paper headlined his slogan:

LULU—SHE STEALS THE SHOW

SATURDAY morning Avery Judd and Maisie Vincent obeyed a summons to the Astral office. Tobler's mien was decidedly serious.

"I want you you should remember this, I want you," he said, waving his finger at Judd. "In these business there are wise guys what are fools, fools what are crooks, and Joe Tobler. When I sign the contract by your picture I know it will damage Lulu Fitzhue: and just the day before, I have engaged Lulu Fitzhue for one million dollars—maybe. That fellow Glaze! Phooey! I don't like him. But suppose I don't buy 'Why Will Lulu Love Me?' somebody else will, and I have a lot of trouble stopping it. Now pret-ty clever, me. I let Glaze work and work so the chimpanzee is a star, good for plenty pictures. Then you see this little girl"—jerking his thumb at Maisie—"I sign her and her monkey to make twelve comedies. But still I don't want to release 'Don't Lulu Love Us?' But under contract I got to. So what I do? I ask you, what I do?"

Avery had no answer. He felt desolate in Maisie's deception.

Seraphs fluttered over Tobler's wrinkles. Striking his chest first with one hand, then with the other for emphasis, "Me—what is Lulu Fitzhue—takes out an injunction against me—what is a chimpanzee."

"I—I think I see," admitted Avery, scratching his chin. "But what part of you is my four thousand dollars?"

"Now I know how you make boob scenarios. Such a boob you are yourself," Tobler exploded. "This little lady, this Maisie won't sign no contract unless you write the stories."

Next month Milton Glaze springs a new stunt in movie publicity on the "benighted" inhabitants of Patterwark—"Broadway Forever," in March EVERYBODY'S, out February 14.

The Flagellant of Farthing Rock

The Lengths to Which an Overpowering Conviction May Lead a Man: a Story of Rockbound Men on a Rockbound Coast

By J. H. Greene

Illustration by D. C. Hutchison

THE oily, tarry schooner was approaching an island. The cabin, reeking with spilt kerosene and habitant tobacco, was infested wtih maritime bugs and cockroaches. I had come on deck to breathe the clean air of the Atlantic, to be washed by spindrift from the long rollers twisted into whirlpools by the islands and the rocks along the coast.

My business was buying the hooked rugs of the fishwives. Up and down the coast I had gathered piles of those patterned floor pictures, woven by women during ice-bound winters—pictures of flowers they had never seen, patterns they could have imagined only from the writhing flames in their fireplaces, the curling smoke from their chimneys, the spume-laced combers curling round obstinate headlands and over treacherous reefs. The few samples I had sent to New York had created a vogue; I proposed staying late into the winter.

There was no one on deck save the man at the wheel, squatting on his feet over the rudder-head, his back bent over his circle of spokes.

I was clinging to a stay, thrown against it as the schooner heeled scuppers under, clinging with both hands as the deck lifted and my leather soles slid on the slippery planks.

"Farthing Rock?" I asked, as solid and harsh outlines like a developing photograph emerged from the mists.

He barely nodded, keeping his dour eyes on his course, paying off and on in deference to the swelling edges of dim green water that leaped at the bows. These men are the only sailors left; they know the sea as a live antagonist, to be humored, coaxed, dallied with, as well as fought and defied.

I knew none aboard. They appeared to be a rather gloomy, distrustful lot, unable to slack up with a stranger. I had met this aloofness before; strangers to them suggest the Government, regulations, taxes, police, interference. But I knew I could bridge it; I was trading and I had my violin to help the trade.

Farthing Rock was rising from the sea, a peak of black rock with red splashes, a coal with fire still in it. White gleamed at its base, becoming long feathers of foam flung back by the cliffs. I saw no houses. The wind blew toward the island, where the shattered surf, pouring with the force of cataracts, must have broken in constant thunders, although no sound reached me. All I heard was the petty noises of the schooner.

The drizzle and the gusts were but the aftermath of spent hurricanes; the eddies of old storms stirred these swirling waters, gnawing at the cliffs, eroding gaps and caverns, and yet the island stood. Centuries of the grinding bergs and ice packs of Labrador, of winds from everywhere, of the Atlantic at her wildest had not prevailed against it.

Farthing Rock, silently holding against the sea and the sky, caught at my throat. I wanted to salute it, to cheer it.

A cluster of pale houses appeared on one side. The tickle opened to the most pitiful of harbors, the piles of the landing stage were like gravestones, the few people motionless as mollusks.

They were of the shock-headed race of the other islands—yellow-haired, blue-eyed, and cheery enough around firesides when the women sang Gaelic songs and knotted their rugs. I wondered how these adventuring people could stay on this rock, forever besieged by the sea, when warmer, easier lands were crying for people, and the sea which had brought them here was open to take them away.

I was put ashore with my belongings. I climbed the wet foot-worn stone steps to the village. The square-built redhead that ran the wine shop did not even lift his lazy elbows at my request for a room. Some of the cottages might take me; he could not. An appeal to the silent men round the bar evoked only blank stares and surly shakes of the head.

"Ye might try Sanders McCoul," said the redhead. "Take the starboard turn, bear aloft up t' roo-ad. Ye'll find him by his window or his lass in her galley."

I thanked him and went out.

As I shut the door the voices within rose with laughter and the clinking of glasses. My departure was a release to some boisterous jocularity. Outside were gathered bare-footed, bare-headed ragamuffins who did not offer to carry my bags, but ran along at my heels.

I passed a trim cottage, and determined to try it before going farther along the narrow road that, with twists and turns, slants and descents, was as giddy as a companionway in a gale. The crone who peeped through an inch of doorway took one look at me from boot to head and shut the door in my face. The boys laughed; I was not welcome at Farthing Rock.

I was angry, for I had come to these people to do them a good turn, to create an industry that would help them over poor fishing. So I grabbed my grip and my violin case and left the cottages to climb to the summit of the island, the boys trailing me as if they were stalking something wild.

The path led by the edge of the cliff. Now I could hear the rhythmic thunder of the waves below. The air was clamorous with gulls, wet with spray. The island was outspread at my feet a somber yet ardent patch of brown, contoured by white surf on the wide map of sea.

The McCoul cottage was the crow's-nest of the island, unsheltered save for a few spruce, a low crag or two, and stood close to the cliff's edge. Sparse flowers grew in the niches of the rocks, and potatoes in a small patch of soil that must have been carried to that height by hand. Again I wondered what manner of man selected the bleak spot to build.

I thought I had better knock at the back door since life in these latitudes is apt to huddle near galley stoves. A dog of the shaggy, degenerate breed of the islands came leaping around the corner and began snapping at me. I heard the boys calling and was certain they were urging the dog to attack me. I picked up a stone, indignant enough to pelt the boys, the whole village, with fragments of their Farthing Rock. The dog slunk away with a yelp as the stone rebounded from his side. A girl appeared from the rear of the cottage.

"Excuse me," I said. "Will you call off your dog? I merely want to ask if you will take a lodger."

Her hair was golden, her complexion sunned and weathered, washed by rains and fogs to a coral pink.

The dog, taking advantage of my eyes being off him, got his teeth into the handle of my violin case, narrowly missing my fingers. I had to kick the brute.

"I'm sorry to trouble you, but I must live somewhere and I have been recommended to you."

"Us wants no soldiers here, mon."

The voice might have come from the jaws of the dog, so like a bark it was. In the doorway a man appeared, with a bushy beard of faded yellow, eyes like flint and a massive head braced by the taut cords of his neck.

"No soldier wi' me. Ye'll git no recruits on Farthing Rock. Us ships no uniforms. No blue putties, no kilties, here."

I understood my chilly reception on the island. My khaki breeches and shirt and riding boots did suggest the army. I explained I was making no demand for quarters, that I had nothing to do with the military or the Government. The man was still distrustful but the girl brightened.

"Sure you can stay wi' we, zur," she said, trying to take my grip.

The man kept glowering as though I were an abomination, till his eyes lit on my violin case; then something like a smile moved his thick whiskers and he held out his enormous hand.

"Come in, zur. I thought ye was a soldier."

His grip was firm but soft with the fluid strength of those that work in water. The dog sniffed round my boots as friendly as his master; the boys dropped their stones; I was made welcome to Farthing Rock.

THE girl showed me a room with neatly curtained windows overlooking the headlands beyond the cottage. She was anxious to atone for my reception, asking me if I liked cakes for breakfast, if I took "sweetness" in my tea. When I told her my business she showed me some rugs of her hooking.

"Maybe ye'll play for we after supper?"

"Certainly. As much as you'll stand."

"But I'll ask yer, zur, not to play marches, or anything like the skirl o' the pipes. Father don't believe in them."

"Does he mind dance music?"

"Oh, no, zur! Us had dancing till Leish Duckworth took his fiddle to sea and his vessel was lost wi' all hands. He shouldn't ha'. Fiddles are unlucky 'board ship."

This was new to me. I now understood the glumness of the men on the schooner.

When I came downstairs I saw a big open Bible and a pair of heavily rimmed spectacles carefully set on the page. Jessie had further reassured me that her father did not think dancing sinful, because David had danced before the Ark. I concluded I had come to board with one of those fanatics whose ardors and endurances are the outcroppings of inner despairs, who can fight the sea and the cold because of their tempests within.

It was an hour to supper, so I went out to look at the village. The boys were waiting, all grinning sheepishly.

"So you thought I was a soldier and hounded the dog on me?" I asked.

"Yes, zur, us thought you be fighting wi' Sanders," said one lad.

The little group kept step with me along the cliff. It seemed I had robbed them of a show.

"Sanders said he'd throw the next soldier down t' Gap yander, into t' sea," said another, his bare toes clinging to a rock over a two-hundred-feet fall.

I looked down that ghastly gap at eagle-nosed crags, black chasms belching white washes, rocks disappearing under green waters and emerging shining and pouring.

"What makes you hate soldiers so?" I asked.

"Dunno, zur, but us does. Sanders says us has to."

"I don't hate them, zur," said another boy.

"You got to," screamed the first.

The two clinched, and were rolling over each other down the slope to the edge of the cliff. I tried to part them. They seemed blind with contest; each lifted leg over leg as they approached that precipitous drop.

"Leave 'em be, zur," cried another of the boys. "Sanders says boys can fight."

"But they will fall, they will be smashed and drowned," I cried.

Already the bare feet of the interlocking youngsters were over the abyss when the under one for the moment looked up and grinned.

"No fear, zur. He can't throw me off. My father once had a fight wi' his uncle on an ice pan. Both was drowned, near, zur. But father went under on top— So, see."

With a quick twist the under boy became the upper and rolled himself and his antagonist safely away from that horrible edge.

I took the road down to the village, and now I was greeted from the cottages. The crone who had shut the door on me smiled; the news had traveled that I had been taken in by Sanders McCoul.

But the boys had hounded the dog on me and I had been sent to McCoul out of the same malice. I was determined to have it out with the redhead in the wine shop, Doug Macalister by the name-board over his doorway.

I found him apologetic and unabashed.

"You see it was the war, zur. Sanders won't have soldiers on Farthing Rock. He came back a changed man—hating war and uniforms. Got a medal, he did, and his picture in the Sydney paper. Governor shook hands wi' him. But Sanders threw the medal overboard and knocked down any man that called him Sergeant."

"Wasn't Sanders too old to go to the war?"

"Not the last war. The Boer War. The war they sang 'The Absent-minded Beggar' to get the lads to go. Sanders was all for recruiting in that war. Said the song was wrong because it said nothing about fishermen. Fishermen had to show they could fight, too."

I wanted to ask more, but questions are unwelcome on all frontiers. I should have to wait to find out why this soured veteran of an old and forgotten war could be so admired and obeyed.

I heard voices, and looked out to see Sanders McCoul marching down the road. It was a march, a parade; the boys surrounded him, keeping an awed but friendly distance, timing their footsteps to his, looking up at him as boys do at a hero. He austerely acknowledged his neighbors at doors and windows, though his eyes were set in an absent stare. There was a rapt aloofness about him. I thought of an old and atrocious picture I had once seen of Moses descending from Sinai with the tablets of the law. He only needed the robes; the worshiping boys, the reverential fisherfolk, the pinnacles of Farthing Rock fitted him to the picture.

"I'm sorry I was so unneighborly, zur," he said to me. "Ye will drink wi' me? Doug, some toddy. Boys, this is my new lodger just come aboard. He has a fiddle, and us will have dancing up t' hoose."

I began to correct my impression of him; he was more like a Highland chieftain, a figure out of Ossian, a seagirt Rob Roy. But not till the September gales did I touch the heart of the mystery of Sanders McCoul.

SUMMER passed, and I had secured many fine rugs. I had traded on other islands, but Sanders always brought me back to Farthing Rock, living as he did in two worlds.

He would sit by the fire of evenings, his big boot-tops lifting to my music, beaming at Jessie dancing with her Aleck, taking children on his knee but pawing all the while and spelling out his texts, his lips moving to tremendous words, his soul in some other place, some other time.

One evening in early September our company had been small. I had not played much, the boys and girls preferring to hear of the cities and lands to the south, of people who had never seen the sea, of grass more than an inch high, of harbors larger than Farthing Rock.

When they had gone Jessie drew up to the fire. She wanted to hear more about houses that were higher than schooners or icebergs, houses that were loaded to the hatches—as I had to translate to her—with clothes, with food other than fish, and where most of the folk lived ashore, taking money over a counter, like Doug Macalister.

"There must be a lot of fish there," she said, wistfully. "I wish I could see that harbor."

I could not help looking my pity at this splendid girl. She could dream of lands of sunshine and perpetual flowers; the dreams were in her rugs, distance was always outside her windows. Why was she anchored to one horizon and this pin-prick of land called Farthing Rock?

Sanders rose and laid aside his glasses.

"Better turn in, lass," he said.

It was Sanders who generally had to be roused from his eternities; he spoke now with his old bark. She looked doubtfully at him, bade us good night, and went up the steep stairway. Sanders was raking the ashes, drawing the spark fender round the fire, doing chores that were usually Jessie's. I was about to climb to my cabin when he stepped between me and the door of the stairs.

"A word wi' yer: ye be unsettling my lass wi' yer talk."

He was as I had first met him, head back, jaws tight, Farthing Rock incarnate.

"If ye want Jessie ye'll have to fight Aleck for her. I allow fighting for a lass. And ye'll have to stay on Farthing Rock. Farthing Rock is the best harbor in t' world."

The wind was high and rising, the cottage shook with the gusts, but the slow certain words of Sanders silenced the gathering tumult of wind and waters. They were words from the lips of a man who had never lied, to whom words were of facts that had happened or of promises to be fulfilled, to whom words were things as stubborn as the rock that bred him.

He was mighty enough to hurl me through the walls, and it was as difficult to explain my interest in Jessie to him as to make her see Manhattan. My glib fluency was the debased verbiage of the cities, the words that sent men to war. I could not attain to his sincerity even when I told him that I had a wife of my own, that I loved her, and wanted none other.

It was like apologizing to an earthquake, my trying to tell those sea-sweeping eyes one could be tender without plotting to possess.

"Us is all creatures of sin. Trample the sairpent under yer heel. Don't let the devil hold yer wheel. Lash him below. Keep him off yer deck. Don't let him be yer lookout. He'll cry, 'Yon's the tickle,' when there's a reef for your bottom. I know; I've been in every harbor in the world, with their red lights on their headlands and red lights at the doors of their women. We have no lights here, red or white, fixed or flashing. Glory be, it's His mercy. He allus liked fishermen. No lights on our headlands, but the one Light the winds cannot put out or the seas drown—"

In another second I would have fallen on my knees; his glare created guilt. I had sailed with men like Sanders. I had been taken round headlands, saved from reef and ice, steered to harbor through the thick and howling dark by eyes like his, by intuitions like his. Farthing Rock had a faith that moved and mastered the mountains of the sea.

He turned from me suddenly and I escaped upstairs, bruised by his personality, saturated by his spirit. The winds at my window and the surf below cried he was theirs—a leashed hurricane, a banked tide. I declared I would not stay the winter; I could not stand winter and Sanders McCoul.

I was trying to smoke and read awhile, when I became aware of a tapping. A loose shingle, I thought, a torn strip, pebbles thrown against the boards—but the sound was too persistent, too regular to be chance. Sanders had prepared me to believe the impassioned materiality of winds and waters was not inanimate; I was in the mood to hear Valkyries shrieking in the wind.

Then I became certain the sound came from within, I went to the door to face Jessie, wide-eyed, with her fingers to her lips.

"YE'LL excuse me, zur," she whispered. "It's about father. Do ye mind if I shut the door? He'd throw you and me off the rocks if he heard me in your room."

Still under the spell of her father, I listened. The girl had all his appalling certainty; what Sanders would do was as sure as the turn of the tides.

"Father's queer again. He can't abide nor'easters. Ye see, zur, brother was drowned and tomorrow is the day."

She was flushed a little, but her eyes met mine. They were sea-searching like her father's, but they induced no sense of sin. She was so simple, so freshly elemental, that these doubts were blasphemies. Maybe women like these, the wives and mothers of Farthing Rock, were the reason why the men could navigate without charts and lighthouses. These people, perhaps, had retained an instinct we had lost that guides the gulls and enables them to breast gusts that rip sails to ribbons.

"Drowned? Fishing?" I asked.

"Yes, zur—no, zur."

Outside was confusion, turmoil, motion gone mad. The surf pounded, pounded, pounded. Surely the island was dragging at its anchorage. Spray pelted like hard steel rain; the cottage and we were being washed, battered, drained into the sea.

Jessie was confused: her speech had tripped, she was terrified.

"How then?" I asked.

Her arms clasped across her magnificent bosom, holding in something that threatened to fly away. I wanted to know what that was; the savagery of the sea was pounding in my veins, and I was savage because I wanted to be tender.

"Why should your father be so queer? What's a drowning to you? What's a better harbor than the bottom of the sea?"

I was tearing the nursling from her arms—prying at the secret on her lips, the evasion that sullied her eyes.

"Father—father drowned him."

She left me before I could speak or ask her pardon; the horror was too sudden, too like a drowning.

I did not sleep. Listening to the all-night plunge of weighty waters and the drag of the undertow, I thought of Sanders McCoul till the morning came. I looked out. Rain clouds bellied close to my windows like mainsails; the waters were white as far as I could see.

It was quite impossible to live in that household any longer, so after breakfast I fought my way down to the village to make arrangements to leave Farthing Rock when the storm should blow out. The descent was a fight with gusts, eddies and waves of wind that ballooned my oil-coat up under my arms till the fear of being lifted from the cliff made me cling with toes, hands and knees. Below, a white welter thrashed the headlands; long sweeps of pale green water writhed under meshes of foam; smoking gusts of thin-blown spray rose from gaps and inlets.

On the road fishermen passed, careening on sea legs, planting their boots for a purchase, for the land was a heeling deck. Old and young women's faces, families of children peered from windows, and I hoped and prayed none of their men would be out on that sea.

The prayer was involuntary; it surprised me to find the old formula on my lips. It could not have come to me anywhere else. I the police-guarded, walled-in man of the cities, a pettifogger of prettiness, a semi-intellectual who ate his breakfast haddie without thinking of the men who netted it, would have scorned prayer; here with these aching-eyed women, knowing as I did that their men would be out in that sea, that no sea could keep them ashore, I prayed. I wanted to go in and comfort them, I wanted to go back and help Jessie with her queer father; if she had come to my room now, the barriers between man and woman would have been forgotten, and I would have encouraged her to come into my arms as children huddle under a lee. I did not want to leave Farthing Rock; I wanted to stay and take the part of its people against the sea.

I was blown into the wine shop, and I had to hold the door lest it should be torn from my hands. But I did not ask what vessels would be going south; I took Doug aside and begged him to tell me all about Sanders and the son that he drowned.

"Ye have heard, then?" he said.

But Doug had to attend to his customers and I waited.

The place was full and I sat at a table to the rear; all greeted me, but none would intrude till I asked for company.

"YE HEARD how the boy was killed by his father, in a fight in the punt?" continued Doug when he returned to me. "Glad you know it at last, zur, and you livin' wi' them. Folks don't talk about it but I allus said you'd learn. No matter since you ain't Government."

I led him on to details, explaining I had only the outlines of the story.

"The boy wanted to go to the war, the last war. A recruiting officer came here. Alan wanted to ship with the Blue Putties. Sanders said he'd drown him before he'd let him go, and he did, out yander, in their punt in a fog. And Sanders ain't been able to forget."

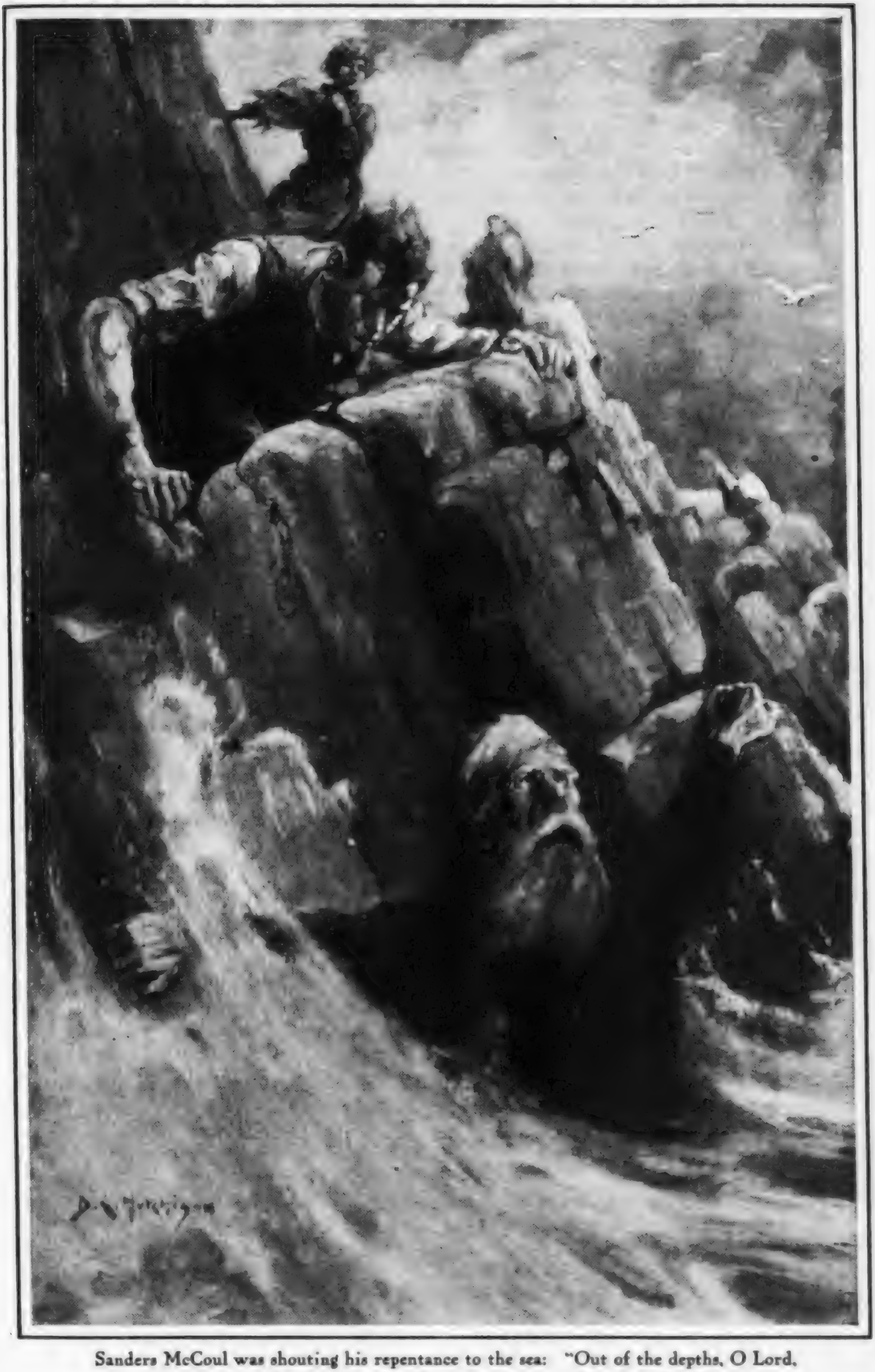
More men blustered in; through the rapidly opened door I had glimpses of the wild white beyond the tickle, darker waters inside, bobbing masts, nodding deck-houses.

"Sanders could not abide soldiering after South Africa. Used to sit there where you be, preaching against it. Used to be a preacher on a sealer 'cause he could read the Book. Just a hand like the rest, only better than most. First on the ice, first to kill, last inboard. Grand man he was, wonderful fighter; used to go out with the boys looking for fights on the other islands when there was none in harbor t' home. But after he come back, no more fighting, he says, and he'd lay us a crack if we did."

"Except boys?" I said, recalling the ragamuffins at the Gap.

"Oh, kids? Yes. I mean fighting that leads to bad blood and killing. All right, we let him preach. Sanders said the Lord was wi' us, and the vessels come home decks under, hold full, nobody lost. Then came the last war. All the boys wanted to go, but Sanders went on preaching. We old uns told him to stow it till the war was over. Yer can't haul to windward on sermons. Them submarines was after our vessels and we was nervous on Farthing Rock. But Sanders went on preaching and the boys wanted to throw him into the sea. Course they couldn't. Us wouldn't let the recruiters touch him, neither. All they did was break his windows.

"But one day, in spite of thick weather and black fogs, then flaws and then more fog, Alan and his father were out in their punt. Schooners and other punts all round. Wind dropped and they could hear Sanders preaching and Alan cussing back. Quite near, it sounded; you know how every sound comes aboard in a fog. Folks said they could hear fighting, splashing, and Sanders calling to Alan. Next the punt comes out o' the fog up to the *Lovely Lis*. Nobody



Sanders McCoul was shouting his repentance to the sea: "Out of the depths, O Lord, out of the depths. Lord, will ye no take the willing sacrifice?"

in it but Sanders. 'I've lost Alan,' he says to Cap'n Ben Davis of the *Lovely Liz*, 'and I can't find his body.' "

"That's right, zur. I was on the *Lovely Liz;* I heerd him," said a voice from the bar.

"And I was in the *Snowbird*, I heerd uns fighting wonderful clear," added another. Doug had become louder and dramatic, drawing all hands away from the bar to listen and to add their testimony.

"But how did you know Sanders drowned him?" I asked. "Did Sanders confess?"

"Never said nothing, zur," said the man who had been on the *Lovely Liz.*

"Then how did you know?"

"Us knowed, zur," said Doug.

The others nodded solemnly, their nods and words as packed with conviction as the words of Sanders. They knew as they knew the unlit headlands, uncharted seas, as men had to know who dared to live on Farthing Rock.

"What happened to him? Was he tried for the murder?"

"No, zur, and he ain't going to be," cried Doug, his squat little figure full of defiance. "Sanders seed the light. I lost my boy in France. I'd sooner his bones was in the sea."

"And mine came back, blind," cried another, sidling up to Doug.

There were growls of agreement from the rest. They confronted me as if I were a police officer; they dared me to arrest or even accuse Sanders McCoul.

I understood. Farthing Rock was part of the world's heart; Farthing Rock would have no more war: the sea was war enough. Sanders McCoul was the preacher of a finer future.

I wanted to ask what Jessie meant by her father being queer, when a big wind filled the room with cold and wet, and a shouting man in the doorway turned all hands.

"T' *Dolly Varden* trying to make t' harbor!"

QUICK as the rest I was out and down to the stage. I made out the peak of a close-reefed jib, heading for the tickle with barely a point to spare in the wind, bows buffeted by great seas, clawing away from snarling reefs.

The wind in our ears, the spindrift in sheets cutting our faces and the tumultuous caldron beyond cried madness to the vessel.

I saw Aleck and others running along the cliffs with a line. Close under a wall crouched women, some screaming directions to the men on the cliffs, others with wet, blown, unshawled heads, staring numbly at the storm.

I climbed the hill for a better view. The breath was blown back in my throat; I ran into something alive that clung to me. It was Jessie.

"Father's gone down the Gap. He's queer, wonderful queer," she screamed close to my face.

"What do you mean?" I screamed back.

"Down t' Gap. He allus goes the day Alan was drowned. Us will have to haul him up. Father will fight. Get a crowd and a rope. Get Aleck."

"Aleck's trying to get a line to the *Dolly Varden*. She's driving on the rocks."

"A wreck? Don't call him. There's ten on the *Dolly Varden.* Us will get father. Come, zur."

As she stood erect she reminded me of the Winged Victory. I soon found she was towing me; she could take that slippery path with speed and certainty, she could beat up against that wind better than the *Dolly Varden.*

We made the cottage, passed it, and came to the opening jaws of the Gap. Today it was a wet throat, with spouting geysers, dripping ledges, roaring caverns filled and emptied, belchings and bellowings, slavering and rabid with foam.

She pointed down the jaws.

"How do you know he is down there? What is he doing? Why does he go?"

"He wants the Lord to take him and the Lord won't. Talk to him, zur. You're a preacher yourself. If you only had your fiddle!"

The winds were threatening to strip her as canvas is blown from a mast. Bidding her to stay, I slid down the gravel.

I dropped from rock to rock, clinging, slipping, falling, till my feet happened on ledges. I reached the bottom of the cliff, shielded by a boulder fringed with spume. The chasm between was dark and deep—a swirling suction of trapped waters. I leaped and landed face down on the boulder, clinging under an arch of foam. As the waters fell I heard a voice from below.

I climbed to the edge. Below was a graveled beach in a hollow under the cliffs.

Waist-deep in the receding waters, his back to the rock, his fingers clutching in the crevices, Sanders McCoul was shouting his repentance to the sea.

"Out of the depths, O Lord, out of the depths. Lord, will ye no take the willing sacrifice? Lord, Lord—"

I called to him, but he did not hear or heed; his face was uplifted, he was almost singing.

The waters drew out; I saw his feet were rooted; he was sunk to the knees in the gravel. I took a chance and leaped down to the beach. I caught at his nearer hand, shouting to him to climb to the boulder before the next wave broke. He did not turn his head, but continued to stare wildly seaward, ranting, while, massing for a return, white curling water lips lifted at the outer rocks.

I tugged at his hand; it was bedded in the rock, it was harder than the rock. Then the sea caught me, flung me down, battered me against the cliff, into the gravel, till my hands, feeling for something to grip, caught the pillars of Sanders's boots mortised in the beach. I held my breath, clinging against the terrific draw of the undertow.

When my head was clear, I heard the rattle of drawn pebbles and Sanders still shouting for the seas to take him. They could not, any more than they could Farthing Rock.

"Am I not worthy, Lord, am I not fit for your hell? Lord, I pray you for my damnation."

He was singing, he was ecstatic, younger, handsome with the happiness of immolation, self-stretched on the cross of his choosing.

I had barely time to climb the boulder before the next wave came in, rising to his neck, veiling him with spray, drowning his rhapsody.

BREATHLESS and unnerved, I reached Jessie. She had crawled down to meet me. I was angry and disgusted. I heard myself shouting my verdict on her father, that flagellant of the sea, who, unable to endure his sin and seeking his death, still wanted it given to him.

"Don't worry about him. He is enjoying himself!"

Bellowings came from above, hoarse voices calling. The angle of sky between the cliffs was filled with brown faces, beckoning hands, waving caps. The voices were cheering, and a man in strange clothes took sure-footed leaps down the crags.

"Alan!" cried Jessie.

The serge-clad sailorman clasped her. Men and women poured down the rocks after him, clamoring above the winds, telling and retelling how Alan had swum to a schooner and had fought in the war. Alan had come home in the *Dolly Varden*, Alan had brought her in, for Alan knew the way to the tickle better than any.

Farthing Rock clustered around the young sailor-soldier, pointing to the rainbow ribbon on his serge, the gash on his cheek, shouting its pride, its joy. They were deaf to the sea, heedless of the wind, lost in oblivious seconds of triumph. Gusts of rain lashed them, spray spouted over them, their footholds slipped and landslides threw them together in heaps, but they stood, they shouted, they cheered.

Alan's voice cut in, "Where's father?"

Jessie pointed down the Gap.

"Every year, every time there's a fog, every time there's a breeze-up, he goes down there; he's wonderful sorry."

"Sorry? What's the sense of that?" answered Alan.

Alan dropped down, all following who could, but I was below and reached the top of the boulder directly after him.

I saw Alan in the gravel drawing Sanders from his hold on the rock, shouting into the rapt face of the old man.

"Father, it's me, Alan, alive."

The next wave was splashing the outer rocks. Men crowded behind me were shouting to both to hold. Calls for a line went up the cliff.

I saw Sanders McCoul let go of the rock, clutch Alan and let him go in dazed bewilderment, then clutch him again with a cry.

He held his son closely, he felt him with those iron fingers that had held to Farthing Rock. He touched the rainbow ribbon on Alan's coat.

"Soldier, soldier, you will not!" he roared.

Sanders could not let go of the rock he had built in his bosom. There were to be no more soldiers. Alan would drown before he would let him go to war; Alan must drown now.

The wave broke and Sanders walked out to meet it, clutching his son by the throat, driving him back, down, and under the sea. The cross of Sanders was empty when the waters fell, the two were out in the undertow, fighting in the turmoil of incoming and outgoing waves, one trying to save and the other to drown.

THE next wave brought them in, a dark spot now heads, now boots. A long cable of men, arms linked, reached from the boulder and caught them from the undertow. They were lashed together as if one flesh, they had to be pulled apart and carried up the cliff.

I stayed a week longer in Farthing Rock. Alan was fitting a sealer, Jessie preparing to marry Aleck, but Sanders was failing.

He became suddenly and unnaturally old. He would still read his texts, but often slept over them, often broke off to advise Alan about his vessel and Aleck about the cottage he was building.

I bade Jessie good-by at the door of her crow's-nest cottage, while Sanders was sleeping. The day was clear and shining.

"I'm afraid he's going, zur," she said. "Soon as us is married he'll go. Must have hurt himself down t' Gap that day."

I understood what had happened to Sanders. The marrow had been washed from his creed, he had nothing left to fight, he could no longer hate himself. He preferred his damnation.

Gardens

By Faith Baldwin

OUR windows look on gardens turned to stone,
On strange, still shapes, from which, not long ago,
The roses laughed in scarlet merriment,
And wrote, upon the drowsy summer winds,
Their colored runes of passionate delight.
But now . . .
How still the garden lies! The snow
Is frozen foam, where slow, blue shadows move,
And summer winds are banished, and the rose
A crimson memory.
Yet, in our hearts
A garden lives and summer knows no death,
But flowers up, in kiss and word and touch,
In little, grateful reachings out to God,
In thanks for blossom-time.
The blackened hearth
Weaves in the room an ardent web of flame,
And makes a sound like laughter.
Dear, outside
The garden waits on seasons—but, within
These old, beloved walls, the Clock of Love
Stands still at Noon and Summer. We have sown
In loyalty and tenderness, in truth,
In understanding, and in sorrows shared,
In pain outlived, and in serene delight,
A garden that would turn to Paradise
The wide, waste places of a frozen world;
A garden that shall live, long after us,
In these, our children, whose small voices are
The very speech of love, and whose wide eyes
Hold, deep, the essence of a thousand suns.

The Story of a Saving Sense of Humor

The Phantom Caravan

The Boy Whom None of His Family Comprehended Shows Signs of a Better Mental Balance in a Time of Adversity Than All the Rest Put Together

By Howard Vincent O'Brien

Author of "Trodden Gold"

Illustrations by Ralph Pallen Coleman

Begin this serial with any instalment. The story up to this point is here.

AMMIEL SPOTTSWOOD did little work the afternoon of the day he became twenty-five. He had come to one of those times of evaluation of life and experience that all men, periodically, have to meet. Strange how, in the last hour or so, all the threads of his past had come together. First, his grandfather had left him ten thousand dollars against his twenty-fifth birthday, giving no previous hint to arouse expectation.

And Phyllis: She had stood it as long as she could—their engagement—hadn't she? She had never loved him, of course. She had loved the man she thought he was, not the nonconformist he always had been, the man who had refused to try for a commission in the war and had insisted on serving in the ranks, the boy who had always been different.

Now, Clem Thorsen: turning up, thus, just as Ammiel was ready to set out for France to loaf his life away on the income of ten thousand dollars; with this invention—left to Adrienne by her father. Adrienne? He didn't know her, even. He had talked with her that one night in Paris. But he had never forgotten her. And he was to see her tomorrow!

Late in the afternoon, Ammiel decided to discuss the situation with Jonas. He found the door to his brother's office closed, and his knock brought no response. The secretary shook her head.

"I don't think he wants to be disturbed."

Ammiel merely smiled, and opened the door.

Jonas sat at a desk littered deep with papers. He looked like a great gaunt rock, half buried in snow.

"Busy?" asked Ammiel, as he closed the door behind him.

Jonas nodded wearily. He looked strangely old; his skin, sallow at best, was unhealthily pallid. His eyes glimmered feverishly in their shadowy caverns, and his hand, in which a pencil was poised, trembled a little.

"What's giving you such a good time?" exclaimed Ammiel.

Jonas stared at the desk. "Income tax," he muttered. "I've had an examiner here most of the day. He just left."

"He must have been a gay playmate," laughed Ammiel. "Gosh—you look all in!"

Jonas leaned forward, letting his head sink until it was pillowed on his arms. Then he looked up, and a spot of anger burned in either cheek. "How can they expect it?" he demanded fiercely. "They don't know themselves. They make a ruling, and then they reverse it. And they ask such questions—questions—questions! I can't stand another minute of it, I tell you!"

"Stand it?" repeated Ammiel, puzzled and a little frightened. "What *are* you babbling about?"

Jonas stared through him, as if he were not there, and his voice rose in an abrupt flash of rage. "You accuse me of that? You dare to insinuate that I—" As suddenly, the flame of passion was extinguished, and he slumped feebly in his chair, like a damp cloth. His voice became plaintive. "I don't know about that—it isn't fair to go so far back. It isn't fair, I tell you—it isn't fair!"

"For the love of heaven," cried Ammiel in awe, "are you off your nut, Jo?" He put his arm around his brother, shaking him gently. "Snap out of it, old thing."

To his astonishment, Jonas seized his hand, clinging to it like a frightened child. "I'm afraid of that, Ammie," he wailed, his big frame shaking. "I don't know—I can't add. The figures dance all over. I can't get the right answer. I'm good at figures, too. Something's wrong." He shivered, as if he were cold.

Ammiel glanced at the littered desk. There were papers all over it, overflowing into the waste-basket, and from there to the floor. Each was covered with penciled figures, in Jonas's precise hand.

"You've been adding too much," he said practically. "You're tired out."

"That's it," cried Jonas. "I'm tired—oh, so tired! But I can't sleep. I get more tired every day. I don't know where it'll end. I can't stand it much longer. I feel—I feel as if I was cracking. I—" His voice trailed away inarticulately.

A cold chill ran down Ammiel's back. "Jo! Why, you're *crying!*" Helplessly, he patted his brother's heaving shoulders. "Jo—what *is* the matter?"

THE storm abated with an abruptness startling in itself. Jonas looked up, his lips wrinkling in a wan little smile. "I'm sorry, Ammiel," he said quietly. "Just nerves. I *am* tired. But that's all. Don't look so frightened."

"Why don't you take a rest?" queried Ammiel. "You haven't had one in years."

"Rest?" muttered Jonas, as if he did not quite understand the word. "Yes, that's it—no doubt of it. Well, just as soon as I get this straightened out, I'll go somewhere. Forget business for a while. Just play golf and listen to the birds. Yes, that's what I need."

"You go right off," declared Ammiel. "Why, man, you're in a bad way!"

Jonas smiled. "I'll be all right tomorrow," he said huskily. "It's been a hard day. That revenue fellow went back to the flood. It was awful!"

"You beat it," insisted Ammiel. "The revenue fellow can wait."

Jonas sighed wearily. "That's just the trouble—he won't. But don't worry, kid." He rose, apparently his well-poised self once more. "I'll hit the hay early tonight. And just as soon as I can, I'll take Jean and go somewhere. I promise."

"I don't think you ought to wait," objected Ammiel doubtfully.

Jonas's laugh was steady enough. "Just a touch of nerves. Just a touch." Methodically, he began gathering up his memoranda, and pushing the books neatly to one side.

"You go on home," ordered Ammiel. "I'll do the tidying up."

Jonas hesitated irresolutely. "All right," he said finally. "Much obliged. I guess I will." He sighed as he put on his hat, and rubbed his eyes with a tired gesture. "It's been a hard day."

When he had gone and the desk was in order, Ammiel sat down to reflect upon what he had seen—the extraordinary spectacle of Jonas—solid, complacent, dominant Jonas—crumbling before his eyes. It was rather overwhelming to find that Jonas, like Stephen, sheltered soft weaknesses behind his granite front.

But the whimsical smile faded, and a grave dismay succeeded. The prospect of flight to a life of lotus-eating tranquillity, so imminent in the morning, seemed visibly receding as the shadows lengthened. Another obstacle was rising in the way of his contemplated hegira toward irresponsibility.

He was profoundly troubled when he reached home, monosyllabic in his replies to the conversation of his mother and sister. "I've had a hard day," he explained when they taxed him with his humor. And, in an effort to change the theme, he added: "By the way, Sal, I met a friend of yours today—John Currier. A very capable young man, with no sense of humor."

"What nonsense!" cried Sarah. "He has a keen—"

"No, my dear. He couldn't have and be so cast down over your handing him the mitten."

"What makes you think he was cast down?" asked Sarah gently.

Ammiel was spared the need of a reply by being called to the telephone. "How bitter he's grown since Phyllis threw him over!" observed Sarah as he went out.

"It was a terrible blow," agreed her mother. "I had so hoped to see him settled. And now—"

Ammiel reappeared. "That was Jean. Jo hasn't come home."

Mrs. Spottswood dropped her sewing. "Ammiel—has something happened?"

"Probably not. But you and Sal might run over there. It's the first time Jo ever failed to show up for dinner. Jean's worried."

His mother flew upstairs, and Ammiel turned to his sister, silencing the interrogation that appeared on her lips. "Keep your shirt on, sis. He probably went back to the office and forgot to phone."

"But that's not like Jo!"

Ammiel smiled thoughtfully. "I've a notion we don't know Jo the way we thought we did."

HE WAS not greatly alarmed as he left the house. Still, there was the singular business of the afternoon—Jonas in tears because he could not add. His foot went down on the throttle of his mother's car, and the protesting hand of a traffic policeman flashed by, ignored.

His pulse was throbbing unduly when he reached the factory. But the tension relaxed when, as he jumped from the car, he looked up and saw the black mass of the building pierced with light from the window in Jonas's office.

He went up the first flight slowly enough. But a second thought came to him. The light, in itself, signified little. The watchman might have turned it on. He took the last steps three at a time.

The door of the inner office was locked. His heart pounded as he tugged at the knob. "Jo!" he called sharply. "Are you there?"

There was no answer. He strained his ears, listening. There was no sound. And then, from within, he heard the rough whisper of wood against wood—the careful closing of a drawer.

"Jo!" he shouted angrily. "Open the door—you idiot!"

There was a momentary silence, followed by slow footsteps, and the door swung open. Jonas, his face pallid, stood with a trembling hand on the knob.

"What's all the excitement?" His lips were quivering, despite a manifest effort to control them, and the smile he struggled for was pitiable.

Ammiel stepped into the room. "Would you mind telling me what you're up to?"

"I might ask you that question," countered Jonas, fighting for a composure which did not come, "breaking into my office this way."

Ammiel frowned. "Jean—" He paused, observant of the way Jonas winced at the mention of his wife. "What's up, Jo?" he queried gently, putting his hand on his brother's shoulder. "Anything I can do?"

Jonas shook his head. "Nothing," he muttered. "I—I'm quite all right."

Ammiel studied his brother. "What made you close that drawer so carefully?"

Jonas was unprepared for that question. His glance went to the desk, and he backed a step away.

Ammiel hesitated. Suddenly, he thrust his brother aside, and in a bound reached the other side of the desk. Jonas uttered a choked cry of anguish, and then, as if his strength were quite spent, collapsed weakly in a chair, his face covered with his hands.

Ammiel stood with his eyes fixed on the open drawer, his expression a compound of horror and amazement. Presently he picked up an object within, and studied it intently. "You shouldn't fool with these automatics," he said quietly. "They're dangerous as hell." With expert fingers he released the magazine, and extracted its contents. He let them run through his fingers and fall, tap, tap, tap, on the glass top of the desk. "Dangerous," he repeated.

Jonas made no reply, but his back shook, and he breathed with the wheezy constraint of a man striving to repress sobs.

Ammiel swept the cartridges into the palm of his hand, and from there to his pocket. Then he picked up the telephone at his elbow and gave a number. "Hello—Jean? . . . Yes, I found him. Just as I told you—doing a little overtime, here at the office. . . . Sure, he's all right. . . . Yes—he'll be home directly. . . . Oh, don't do that! He just forgot, that's all. . . . Yes, I know. But he's had quite a bit on his mind—quite a bit. Treat him gently—there's a dear. . . . Thanks." Slowly, he put the receiver on its hook and turned to Jonas. "Now then," he urged gently, "spill it."

Jonas looked up, his eyes filled with a pathetic dumb helplessness. He shook his head wearily. "I—I can't," he whispered.

"It isn't as bad as you think it is—nothing ever is. Come—spill it."

HALTINGLY at first, but with ever-increasing volume, like water coming through a wall of sand, the pent-up store of Jonas's emotion poured out. Ammiel listened gravely, a deepening frown of perplexity between his eyes, and when Jonas paused he shook his head.

"I'm stupid, Jo. I don't understand."

"What don't you understand?"

"Oh, it's clear enough. I get the fact that Bremling Spottswood isn't doing as well as it might. Only—I don't see why it's so almighty serious."

"But we're losing money!"

"Sure. But you aren't losing it any faster than you made it during the war, are you?"

"No—but inventory values are shrinking. Collections are awful. Cancellations—"

Ammiel dismissed these matters with a wave of his hand. "Maybe you're in for a storm. But the business has weathered storms before, hasn't it?"

"I suppose it has," mumbled Jonas gloomily. "But this tax—"

"Well—if you're caught, you'll be fined," said Ammiel cheerfully. "Maybe you'll go to jail. But they won't give you life. And if I got through two years in the army—"

Jonas groaned, covering his face again. "Oh, but the disgrace of it! What would Steve say? It would ruin him!"

Ammiel's lips hardened slightly. "I don't think so. Anyhow, you aren't caught yet. And you say your lawyers don't think you will be. So that leaves only this indictment for price-fixing hanging over your unhappy head. And the worst you can get out of that is a fine, isn't it?"

"I suppose so," admitted Jonas.

"Well then—outside of ruin and a couple of years in the hoosegow, you haven't got anything to worry about, have you?"

Jonas's lips flickered momentarily in the shadow of a smile. "That's all." Then he shuddered. "But my mind's going! I can't sleep! It's awful!"

"Shell-shock," said Ammiel. "That's all. Things have been popping too fast for you. I know. Nerves get screwed up tighter and tighter, until if you blow on 'em they screech like a love-sick cat. We've got to take you out of the line, my lad."

"But I can't leave," cried Jonas in a voice of agony. "I know I'm a wreck. But I can't leave. The business would go smash. What would become of Jean and the kids? and mother—all of you? Oh, I don't know what to do!"

"Say, listen." Ammiel put his arm around his brother's shoulders. "There's nothing in this indispensable stuff. I learned that in the war. Why, I remember a company of leathernecks near us on the Ourcq that lost all their officers. They wound up with a dishfaced little wop corporal who'd never commanded anything but a regiment of cooties—he took his objective and held off three counter-attacks as well as Julius Cæsar himself could have done it. Anyhow, you've haven't any choice, Jo, old dear. We can't have you fiddling around with high explosives this way. It's too dangerous. You might hit somebody besides yourself. These automatics are hard to handle."

"Can't you be serious—even now?" sighed Jonas querulously. "Has nothing ever moved you?"

"How could it? I have no soul. Just as you have no imagination. But we've talked enough. Here's your hat. You're going home, now—and from there to California."

"I couldn't leave now," protested Jonas, as Ammiel extinguished the light. "Not with all these things hanging over me."

"Leave them to your lawyers. That's what they're for."

"But the business—"

"I'll watch out for that. Come."

Jonas stood irresolute for a moment, his big figure casting grotesque shadows in the faint moonlight from outside. "I can't do it," he murmured in a weak whisper. "I can't." Then he swayed, and would have fallen if Ammiel had not caught him.

For a moment he was inert, and Ammiel thought he had fainted. But his eyes opened presently, and in a voice that was a feeble echo of itself, he managed to whisper: "If I go, it'll be up to you—to carry on."

Ammiel continued to propel his brother toward the door. "Righto," he said cheerfully. "You go out and play in the sunshine. I'll carry on."

"The sunshine—and the color," echoed Jonas drowsily as he sank back in the cushions of the car. "Flowers and growing things—what a dream, Ammie, what a dream!"

"Dream on, old bean," answered Ammiel as he put his foot on the starter. "You need it."

Silence followed. There was no sound save the hum of the tires on the asphalt. Ammiel glanced at the figure beside him. Jonas seemed asleep. Small wonder! The poor devil had gone to hell and back.

An electric-lighted billboard flashed by; a phrase was imprinted on his retina—something about a Mediterranean trip. Heigho! Finer grew the mesh of circumstance, and winking ever more feebly in the distance was the light of freedom. He shivered, though the night was not cold. Sunshine, color—there would be little of either at Bremling, Spottswood & Company.

He heard his name called, as from a great distance. Hearing it again, he emerged from his reverie and looked at his companion.

"Ammiel," said the latter, sitting up, in a tone strangely firm, "do you know—I think I'll take up painting!"

"Yes?" They were in the downtown traffic now, and Ammiel found it necessary to watch the road.

"I've always wanted to. Never had the time. Oh, Ammie—think of it! Time—*time!* And quiet!"

"Not less than six months," said Ammiel curtly, as he swung the car into the boulevard which led toward home. "I'll need at least that long."

AS IRON is drawn to a magnet, Ammiel went to keep his luncheon engagement with Thorsen and his "partner." There was no volition about it. On the contrary, instinct warned him sharply to stay away. He acknowledged the warning, politely—and wished that the streetcar which bore him would move more rapidly.

Reaching the restaurant, he hesitated outside. Something told him that if he entered he would not emerge as he went in. The place took on the quality of a trap, and he eyed it doubtfully. To pass that doorway would be the end of freedom. He knew that, without at all knowing why he knew it. Then a wan smile crossed his lips—freedom was a mirage—and went in.

Thorsen, evidently, was looking for him. He came forward from a corner table, his hand outstretched. "This way, Spotty."

Ammiel did not need his guidance. His eyes had already found that which they sought. At the table, he scarcely heard Thorsen's metallic voice making the introductions. He had prepared exactly what he was going to say, but the words left him. He could only bow, feeling a most absurd and unexpected embarrassment.

She showed only frank astonishment. "Why—it's *you!* How extraordinary!"

"You didn't tell me you'd met Miss D'Aulignac," said Thorsen, faintly suspicious.

Ammiel nodded. It irritated him that Thorsen should pronounce her name with the accent on the first syllable. It constituted a kind of sacrilege.

"We met in Paris," he said curtly.

"What a meeting!" she exclaimed. "I—I'm surprised you recall me—it was so dark."

"The darkness did not hide your voice," answered Ammiel.

Thorsen's rather heavy eyebrows lowered slightly. He picked up the menu card. "Better get in your order, Spotty."

Ammiel smiled understandingly. This meeting had not been arranged for purposes of reminiscence. He gave his order to the waiter. Then he turned to Thorsen. "Now then, Clem—how about the brass tacks?"

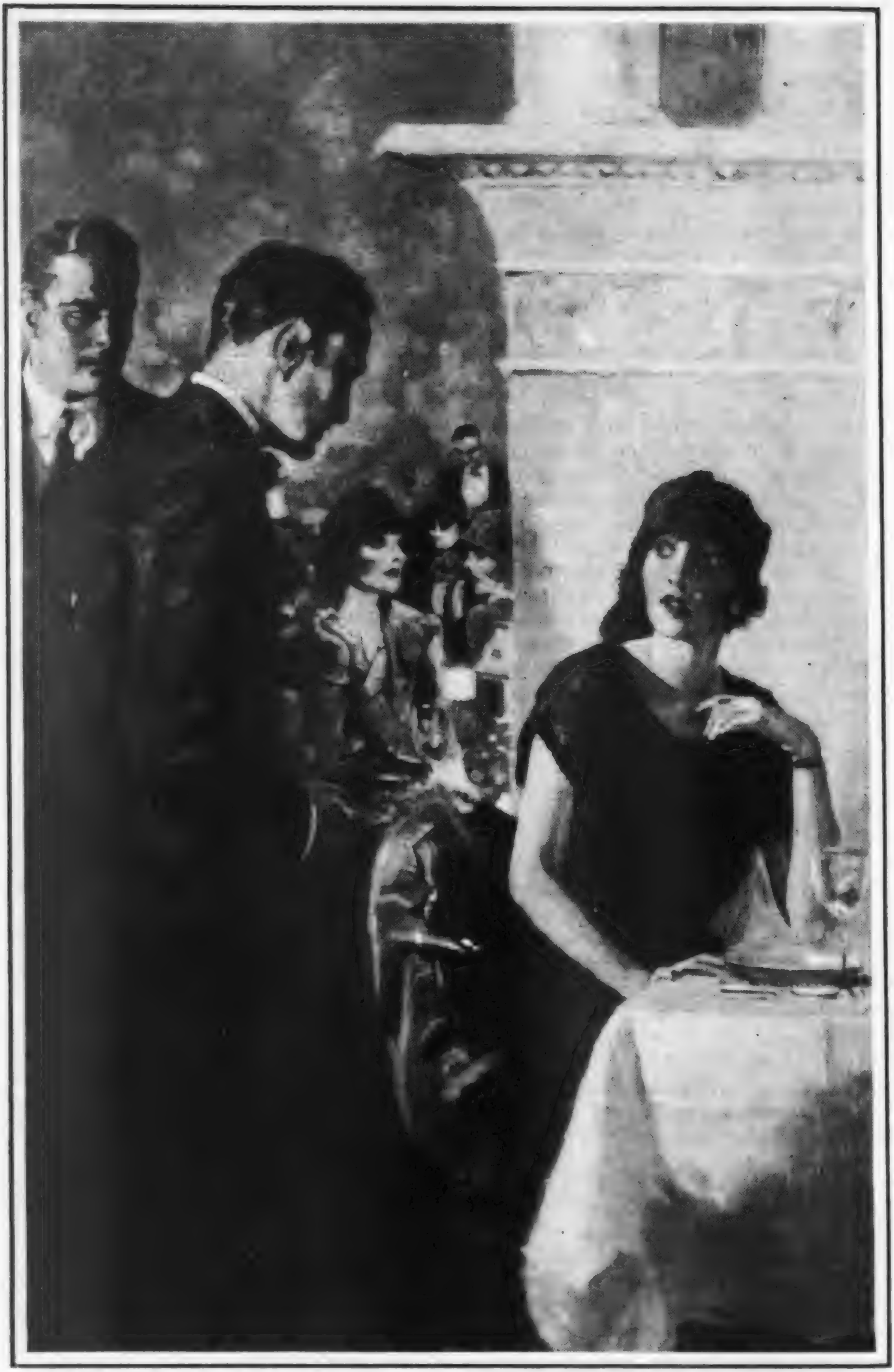
Thorsen rubbed his hands together. "Well, I've talked it over with Miss D'Aulignac, an' she's agreeable to your coming in on this deal."

"It's very kind of her," murmured Ammiel, his eyes fixed on hers. He wondered why they wavered and sank before his gaze.

"The way I dope it out," continued Thorsen, "is to form a little company—"

"A little company," echoed Ammiel, his mind occupied with the construction of a fit simile for the exquisite complexion of the girl opposite him.

"How would this arrangement strike



Ammiel needed no guidance. But at the table his prepared speech left him; he could only bow. Adrienne showed only frank astonishment. "Why—it's *you!*"

you: we go in on a three-way basis—Miss D'Aulignac puts in the patents, I do the work, and you—"

"Supply the money?"

Thorsen showed momentary confusion. "I don't know any better investment," he declared with a touch of belligerence. "The thing'll be a world-beater."

"I wasn't objecting," said Ammiel. "Go on."

Thorsen, reassured, went on briskly. "We'll have it made, at first—till we get on our feet, an' have a factory of our own. There won't be any expense, outside a little advertising. I'll keep my job, an' work nights. Later, of course—anyhow, you'll be treasurer an' have your fingers on the dough."

"WHAT are your ideas?" demanded Ammiel abruptly, addressing the girl. He put a faint emphasis on the pronoun.

Her color rose slightly at the question, and she hesitated a moment. "My knowledge of business is very limited, Mr. Spottswood—"

"No more than mine," laughed Ammiel.

"But my father had great confidence in this device. Partly from the necessity of supporting myself, even more, I think, from a desire to make a kind of memorial to the long years of effort he put into it, I am anxious to see it established."

"Naturally," agreed Ammiel. He was thinking that her voice had the timbre of a flute, but with a sweeter tone than that of any instrument contrived by the hand of man.

"As to the details of its establishment," she continued, "I have left them to Mr. Thorsen, in whom I have confidence."

"Naturally," said Ammiel again.

"There's three parts to every deal," declared Thorsen earnestly. "The idea, the work an' the money. They—"

"That seems reasonable," agreed Ammiel. "Well, what's to be the name of the company?"

Thorsen visibly relaxed. It was quite evident that in his mind a crisis had been passed. "Well, here's my idea. It's really the D'Aulignac Superheater, of course; but you couldn't use that name—"

"Why not? I like the sound of it," objected Ammiel.

"Oh, it's pretty enough! But nobody could pronounce it. I can't myself—just right."

Ammiel turned to the girl. "How *do* you pronounce it?"

"Exactly as it's spelled," she answered, with a wicked little gleam in her dark eyes.

Ammiel understood. This was a business conference—she asked of him that he hew to the line.

"It's a superheater, all right," went on Thorsen. "But that don't mean anything. I think we ought to call it an economizer, or something like that."

"The Thorsen Economizer," said Ammiel. "That sounds fine."

"Well, I—I don't know," stammered Thorsen. "I—"

"Miss D'Aulignac, I'm sure, agrees with me," insisted Ammiel.

She nodded.

Thorsen's pencil was already out, making figures on the tablecloth. "It looks all right," he announced. "Well, all right—let's get down to cases. We'll incorporate the Thorsen Devices Corporation—"

"Devices?"

"Sure! We'll be making other things, maybe—all sorts of accessories."

"Isn't—er—'corporation' a pretty big word to—start with?"

Thorsen nodded reluctantly. "Maybe 'company' would be better. The Thorsen Devices Company—yes, that sounds good. Good enough to start with, anyhow."

In dreams, Ammiel had experienced the sensation of sliding helplessly down a steep roof, saved from destruction only by a timely awakening. He had exactly the same sensation now, save that the comforting subconscious understanding that it was only a dream was absent. It was too painfully real. "I—I haven't much money, you know," he said in a hollow voice.

"How much can you put in?" demanded Thorsen.

Ammiel hesitated. "Five—five thousand dollars."

Thorsen looked a little dismayed. Then his face cleared. "It's plenty," he declared confidently. "We can borrow more if we need it later. We—"

The girl interrupted him. "Is that all the money you have in the world, Mr. Spottswood?"

Ammiel merely looked at his plate.

If she took that for affirmation, his conscience would be at least partially cleared.

Her eyes clouded with distress and she turned to Thorsen. "I don't think we ought to let Mr. Spottswood risk—quite so much. It is a risk, you know."

"No," declared Thorsen stoutly. "He can't lose. He'll have the money right under his thumb. He'll be treasurer."

AMMIEL caught the girl's eye, and answered her hesitancy with a blithe smile. "Nothing venture—nothing win. Besides I have nothing else to do with the money. I—I had other plans. But they went into a cocked hat last night. Well, where are the papers, Clem?"

Thorsen drew some documents from his pocket. "I got a lawyer to fix these up," he explained, a trifle apologetically, as if he feared that his preparedness might be misconstrued. "You don't need to sign this now, if you don't want to."

Ammiel took out his fountain pen. "The sooner the better," he said as he signed his name with a flourish. "If we're going to revolutionize the automobile industry, every minute's delay is costing the public millions of dollars."

He was conscious that the girl's eyes were fixed on him, and he looked up to find them filled with interrogation. Later, when they had left the restaurant, and Thorsen, bubbling with figures and extravagant prophecies, had sped off to establish the Thorsen Devices Company, she put the interrogation into words.

"Mr. Thorsen said you were a very rich man."

"Clem takes the glitter for the gold," he smiled.

"I believe in our device," she went on thoughtfully. "My father believed in it so. And Mr. Thorsen is a practical man. But it is a gamble—"

Ammiel interrupted her, dismissing the whole subject with a gesture of finality. "Tell me," he said. "What did your people think of this—"

She showed her teeth in an appreciative smile. "My wild-goose chase, you call it? I have no 'people.' There is only my aunt, Mme. Berard."

"She did not think well of it?"

"Naturally—no. But what choice had I? She, poor soul, barely exists, herself. I had to have occupation."

"Marriage, for example?"

Her sensitive lips hardened a little. "That is a hard way to earn one's livelihood. Besides, I had no dot."

"But you have relatives in this country? Grand Rapids, didn't you say?"

"You remember that?" She was candidly astonished. "Did you take notes, perhaps?"

"They were taken for me," he confessed. "I don't know why. I've forgotten nearly everything else; but that night—there's not a line wiped out. Extraordinary!"

She glanced at the watch on her wrist. "I must hurry. I am due at the store now."

"You haven't told me about your people in Grand Rapids. Why do you do this? Haven't you seen them?"

She stiffened imperceptibly. "There are some cousins. No, I have not seen them. It—it would be difficult."

More than her words, her bearing expressed her meaning. She radiated pride. Physically as delicate as a moth, quite as essentially feminine as Phyllis Jerrold, she was without that quality of dependence that he associated with women. He felt rather futile when he slipped his arm in hers at the passage of a crowded crossing.

"It seems ridiculous for you to be selling hats!" he exclaimed, when they paused for a moment at the entrance of Spiegel-Klein's. "Such a trifling business!"

"On the contrary," she countered. "Nothing could be more grave. If you don't believe it, come up and watch me work!"

Ammiel glanced at the clock overhead. He had an appointment with the foundry superintendent at two, and it was that now. His face darkened. The tyranny of clocks—the thing must be fought against. "I will," he said.

THE decision was a mistake. He had really meant only to accompany Adrienne to her floor, and then hurry back to the office. But he tarried, while she put away her coat. And so it was that his sister Hester, passing through the department, saw him leaning against a counter, his eyes fixed watchfully on a distant doorway.

"What in the world are you doing here?" she exclaimed.

That question, put thus bluntly into words, proved unanswerable. He did not clearly know what he was doing there. "I—I was waiting for a friend," he said confusedly.

"A friend? What sort of a friend?" There was a glint of suspicion in Hester's eyes.

He looked around him helplessly. "Why—er—" he began, wondering how he could explain Adrienne in terms that the hopelessly literal Hester could possibly understand. "I—" At that moment Adrienne emerged from the cloak room, and impulsively he made a movement toward her. But a waiting customer intervened, and she could only flash a brief smile at him, before vanishing behind a row of show-cases.

"Oho!" said Hester. In her coldly determined way she put her hand on his arm. "So—flirting with shop-girls. I am astonished, Ammiel!"

"Don't be an idiot!" he whispered wrathfully, as he shook off her hand. "You don't understand."

"I understand perfectly," she answered with the icy composure he knew so well. "I think you had better get back to your office and try to remember that you are a gentleman."

His wrath left him, and dejection took its place. It was true that he ought to be at the office. It was also true that he had no valid reason for hanging around the millinery department of Spiegel-Klein's. He gave a last glance at the blank face of the show-case, and followed his sister.

"You don't need to be so lofty," he expostulated when he had caught up with her. "She— I knew her abroad. She's a perfectly decent girl—"

"This is no place to discuss the matter," said Hester frigidly.

A thought suddenly struck him, and he seized her arm, bringing her to an involuntary halt. "By George! I'd forgotten all about it. You—"

"Forgotten what?"

"The party you're giving for the French ambassador. Why, he's going to stay at your house, isn't he?"

"He is doing us that honor."

"Fine! Now look here—I want you to invite my friend."

Hester's severe features froze in a kind of horror. "Ammiel! You don't mean what you're saying!"

"I'll draw a diagram, if you like," answered Ammiel dryly. "Of course I mean it. Why not?"

There was a convenient alcove near by, and Hester propelled him into it. "See here," she said as vehemently as Hester ever allowed herself to speak. "It's bad enough, your having so little idea of your responsibilities as to behave this way. But—"

"My responsibilities?" He stared at her blankly. "I have no responsibilities."

"Certainly you have. You come of a family that is—well, rather more than ordinarily prominent. What you do is noted—commented upon. It is your duty to us to behave yourself. If you can't be a gentleman, at least, for goodness' sake—"

"Be discreet?" he supplied with a grin.

She nodded crisply. "If you must have affairs with disreputable millinery clerks, please don't thrust them upon us. Really, Ammiel, I have never been more shocked in my life!"

A MOMENTARY gust of black rage swept him at her words—never, he was aware, had he been more intensely angry. But that passed, and he merely sighed. "I'm a perfect model of respectability, Hester, old thing."

"What were you doing in the millinery department?" demanded Hester sternly. "Answer me that."

Ammiel made a rueful grimace. "I can't. That is—well, I'd just met her, and she worked here, and—"

"I see," said Hester with a curling lip. "I understand perfectly. Well, next time, you might have the grace to select a less public place for your affairs."

"Look here!" Indifferent to her apprehensive glances toward the near-by aisle, Ammiel seized his sister and swung her around. "I never knew anybody in the world that knew more things that weren't so than you. But this breaks all records. I may be everything you think I am, but that girl over there's as complete a lady as ever walked the earth. And you're going to invite her to your confounded reception or I—I—I'll *marry* her, that's what I'll do!"

"Let me go," protested Hester. "Ammiel—somebody'll see you!"

"They'll hear me, too, in a minute," he answered grimly. "Here." He took a pencil from his pocket. "Here's her name, and you can address the invitation to her here in care of the store."

"But I can't do this," wailed Hester, yielding under his determination. "I've asked only a few people, and—"

"I understand. And all hand-picked. The very best people. Well, maybe it'll be a treat to his nibs to have some one who can address a few words in his own lingo."

"There are several people who speak French," said Hester stiffly.

"I don't think the ambassador speaks your kind, dearie," grinned Ammiel. "Well, is everything understood? I've got to hustle back to the office now."

"I understand nothing," said Hester with a toss of her head. "And you least of all."

"Don't try," urged Ammiel, giving her a gentle slap on the back, and smiling delightedly at her expression of disapproval. "It's hopeless. Cheer-o!"

He turned to go. Then he hesitated. "Oh! Guess I forgot to tell you." His voice sank to a confidential whisper. "My friend—she's a countess. But it's a secret. Don't let on you know."

Then he fled.

TO DOUGLAS PADGETT the line between wrong and right was as sharp as the edge of a tropic shadow. He was perfectly certain that he had done his friend, Ammiel Spottswood, a great wrong. It was a wrong that must, somehow, be expiated. But because he did not know how to expiate it, he contrived to avoid his victim for a number of weeks. His sleep was fitful during that period, his days altogether miserable, and there came a time when he could endure it no longer.

"I'm sorry, Ammie," he said, his head hanging. "I—I did a rotten thing."

A smile crept to Ammiel's lips, but at the anguish on his friend's countenance, it vanished. "Do you love her, Padge?" he asked.

"Why, of course I do! Good Lord, you don't suppose I—"

"Does she love you?"

Padgett slowly nodded.

Ammiel's chair squeaked cheerfully as he leaned back, his thumbs in the arms of his waistcoat. "Well then," he said judiciously, "that's all there is to it, isn't it?"

"But, Ammie—" began Padgett miserably.

Ammiel checked him. "Listen, old bean. The wisest thing Phyll ever did was to pass up her chance of going into partnership with me. I'm poor—"

"No poorer than I am," objected Padgett stubbornly.

"I am the most completely useless object that Nature ever fashioned, my boy. And Phyll was smart enough to discover it in time."

"You aren't useless," said Padgett, not altogether with conviction.

Ammiel merely smiled. "We won't argue that. You know me better than most people."

Padgett's eyes brightened. "Then you aren't—you aren't sore at me?"

"That is an inelegant word, Douglas," frowned Ammiel. "But I get your thought. No, my dear, I am not. I'll kiss you, if you like."

Padgett stirred uncomfortably. "You might be a little—"

"Don't say it," warned Ammiel. "I'm not serious. I never have been serious. And God willing, I'm never going to be."

"But, Ammie—"

"Snap out of it, Padge. The war's over. Your saving Phyll from trying to save me was the best thing you ever did. And if you don't know it, I do. So let's can that and talk about something else. What's your program—after the wedding, I mean?"

"I'm awfully glad you feel that way, Am!" exclaimed Padgett with great relief. "I—"

"Answer my question," ordered Ammiel sternly.

"Well, I'm going into the factory."

"Old Peter's?"

Padgett nodded, and hung his head. Ammiel's face darkened in a frown of disapproval.

"I was afraid of that. You're a brass-bound imbecile, Padge! So you're going to make vanishing cream and toilet water, eh? Oh, what an ass!"

"I'm not an ass," countered Padgett, on the defensive. "I've got to make a living, haven't I?"

"But you were such a promising young architect," complained Ammiel. "Old Deacon

Kemp used to bore the life out of me telling what a future you had!"

"It'd be years before I'd get anywhere in architecture," said Padgett gloomily. "Years and years—and years."

"Whereas, making luscious lozenges for lazy ladies you'll rise to affluence in no time. Does the prospect please you—carrying on in old Jerrold's footsteps?"

"No," answered Padgett in a flat voice.

"Well then, why do it?"

Padgett shrugged his shoulders. "I told you: I've got to make a living."

"THAT'S no answer," stormed Ammiel, rising from his chair. "The question is, what'll you do with your living after you've got it? That's all that matters. Oh, the thing's absurd! Old Jerrold's simply rolling in money."

"That's nothing to me," said Padgett stiffly.

"Bosh!" exclaimed Ammiel. "Of course it is. Oh, not for yourself," he added, at the expression on his friend's face. "I could call you a lot of names—but fortune-hunter's not one of 'em. No, that isn't the point. The point is, what's Jerrold's money to him? What's he getting with it? He'll leave it all to Phyll, won't he? And then—what'll *she* do with it? Think she'll have any fun out of it with you hanging around the house muling and puking because you'd got stuck in a face-powder factory when God had meant you to be an architect?"

"But what can I do?" murmured Padgett hopelessly.

Ammiel perched himself on the radiator, his chin in his hand. For a moment he was silent, contemplating the bowed figure of his friend. Various ideas flitted through his head, fantastic and unrelated. But when they unified and took form in some sort of plausibility, he still hesitated—Padgett was such an unreal, stiff-necked ass! He always insisted on looking at things with his feet in the air, instead of on the ground where they properly belonged.

"Well," he said finally, "I suppose you'll do the conventional thing—you always do. But I'll do what I can to stop you. Look here." He took out a pencil and made some figures on the back of an envelope. "Let's be practical."

Padgett smiled at that. "That sounds funny, coming from *you*."

"Everything I say sounds funny to most people," admitted Ammiel cheerfully. "But the reason you think I'm standing on my head is because *you* are. Listen. Put this thing in figures. Will Phyll be happier with a gloom at fifty thousand a year, or with a rising young architect with a sunny disposition at five? I ask you, now."

"It'd be years before I could earn even that much," muttered Padgett literally.

Ammiel frowned with impatience. "Oh, sure! But you'd make it eventually, wouldn't you?"

"Well, yes, I suppose I would."

"All right. Now look here. I've gone into business. Jo's going off to California and all that. And I'm interested in another little proposition. I'm sort of in the habit. I—well, to make it short, I'm in the market for good things."

"What *are* you driving at?" queried Padgett blankly.

"This." Ammiel returned to his desk and took out a sheet of paper. "I'm going to form a new corporation: Douglas Fathead Padgett, Inc. I—"

"But, Ammie—"

"Shut up, sweetheart. This corporation will ultimately be very profitable. But there's a lot of development work to be done first. It may take five years. However, that's all right. Here's the investment. Plant and fixtures—nothing. Tools—what's a drawing outfit cost?"

"But, Ammie—"

"All right. Ten dollars. Patents, etc.—zero. Raw material—same. The big item is salaries. You, D. Fathead, are president and general manager. Hum." He paused, chewing his pencil ruefully. "A thousand a year's all we can pay you, Mr. Fathead. Still if you live in France—"

Padgett's eyes were wide, staring with something like alarm in them. "What in the world are you talking about?"

"As president, Mr. Fathead," continued Ammiel loftily, "you will be good enough to ask no questions. I realize, however, that you are unfamiliar with the details of business. But I am a patient man. I will explain again. You will take your little wife to the Latin Quarter—or wherever architects go—and stay there till you're ready to come back. You'll draw a salary of one thousand dollars a year. You—"

"I thought you were poor," gasped Padgett. "You—you talk 'ike a millionaire!"

"FACETIOUS comments from our employees are not welcome," said Ammiel coldly as he rose and held out his hand. "Good-by, Mr. Fathead. I shall expect frequent reports of your progress."

"Ammie!" cried Padgett in real consternation. "Are you completely out of your head? I—I don't know what to make of you at all!"

"You've got both precedent and company for that," laughed Ammiel. "But don't look so scared. I'm perfectly sane. Good Lord, do I have to explain this all over again?"

Padgett shrugged his shoulders helplessly. "I'm sure I don't understand it yet."

"But it's as clear as a bell!" exclaimed Ammiel irritably. "Look here. If a fellow came in here and wanted me to invest in a—well, a gold mine, let's say, that would take five years to develop, but would pay a hundred per cent after that, don't you suppose I'd jump at it? Well, you're my gold mine. I tell you, I'm a business man. And this is a straight business proposition."

Padgett merely blinked stupidly, and said nothing.

Ammiel surveyed the relaxed figure of his friend. "From your looks, Mr. Fathead," he said contemplatively, "one would call you a rotten investment. Fortunately, I've known you long enough to get over your face."

Padgett shook his head in a bewilderment that was obviously complete. "I've known you a long time, Ammiel," he sighed. "But I'm damned if I can tell when you're serious and when you're not!"

Ammiel was spared the necessity of a reply by the entrance of his secretary.

"I thought I ought to remind you of this," she said, holding out a memorandum slip to him.

"Oh, by George!" he exclaimed. "That Kalamazoo fellow. Has he been waiting long?"

"Nearly an hour," answered the secretary with a disapproval she did not altogether conceal.

Ammiel pursed his lips. Then he smiled, and his face cleared. "He's hopping mad, I expect. Well, *tant mieux*. You know, Miss Barr, there's nothing better in a fight than having the other fellow mad. Then he'll lick himself." He turned to Padgett. "That will be all for you, Mr. Fathead. Beat it."

"But, Ammie—" protested the other. "I can't go like this. I—"

"You'll go on your ear if you don't hurry," said Ammiel. "I'm the busy business man. Can't you see that? And I'm not going to explain this thing a fourth time!"

"Oh, I understand it. But I've got to thank you, and tell you that although it isn't possible—such a wild scheme—still, I—"

Ammiel pointed to the door. "Mr. Joblots of Kalamazoo is coming in here to drink my blood. He might make a mistake and think you were me. Scat!"

Still feebly protesting, Padgett suffered himself to be propelled gently from the office. He stood for a moment on the threshold. "But, Ammie—" he began.

"Get out!" roared Ammiel. "I've been trying for a solid hour to get rid of you!"

His face scarlet, Padgett turned, to face another man coming in. The latter surveyed him with evident disapproval, and Padgett heard him say, just before the door closed: "I understand, Mr. Spottswood. Those fellows *are* hard to deal with."

More puzzled than ever, he went slowly down the stairs.

THE rest of the day was fully occupied with the troublous affairs of Bremling, Spottswood & Company. Later that evening, as he walked toward the station, Ammiel thought of Padgett and his problem. He smiled at first, recalling the expression on his friend's face. But the smile quickly faded. The scheme was practical enough, despite what people—Currier, for example—would certainly say about it. Padgett had talent. He would make good, all right. But Phyllis complicated the matter.

Ammiel had no illusions about Phyllis. He could not picture her living in a studio-bedroom with a wood stove through a Paris winter. The idea was too preposterous. A thousand a year—why, that would hardly keep her in shoes. Plain living and high thinking—that was all very well for Padge—he might do it. But

Phyllis—why, she wouldn't understand what it was all about. She'd start it all right—a thousand a year would look as big to her as a million, since she'd probably never paid a bill in her life. But when it came to carrying a basket to the market, with a dozen francs in her pocket, and coming home with a few greens and a pound of tripe—he chuckled sadly at the picture. They did those things in novels and her grandmother might have done it; but Phyllis couldn't. He ground his teeth in sudden rage. If Padge wanted to be an architect, why the devil had he gone falling in love? The poor idiot!

With rather doleful thought, he turned the corner toward the station. Having embarked so bravely on the plan, he was disappointed to find it falling down at the first analysis. Padge, perhaps, was right: he was a little mad. Ah, well, he told himself, with a last sigh, there were enough architects in the world anyway. And he had enough problems without troubling himself gratuitously with that of Padgett. That was plain. And then, just when he had settled matters, he chanced to glance up, and his eye fell upon an illuminated billboard, carrying a picture of a girl, her teeth outlined in flashing electrics, with the legend underneath: "Make Your Kisses Worth Stealing—Use Jerrold's Cream."

His nose wrinkled in momentary disapproval. Then he slapped his thigh. By George, it was an omen! That sign must have been there for months, but he had never seen it before. Without another moment's hesitation, he slipped into a telephone booth and left word for his mother that he was detained in town on business.

After a frugal dinner at a near-by lunch counter, he went to see Mr. Peter Jerrold.

The butler who answered his ring could not quite conceal his surprise. Ammiel grinned appreciatively. "Haven't been around as much lately, have I, Jansen?" He tossed his hat on the carved oak settee in the hall. "Looks familiar, lying there, eh, Jansen?"

The butler, who took his profession seriously, said nothing. But there was a quite human commiseration in his eyes as he stood respectfully at attention.

Ammiel saw it, and acknowledged it with a little smile. "Thanks, Jansen—you're a good fellow. And now—is Mr. Jerrold here?"

"He's in the library, sir."

"Will you ask him if I may have a few moments?"

As he sat waiting for the butler's return, Ammiel kept one eye on the broad staircase. If Phyllis were at home, he hoped she had not heard his voice—or, having heard it, would not come down. Seeing Phyllis was no part of the evening's program. Seeing Phyllis at any time was to be avoided. She always acted as if something dreadful had just happened: and he found it a considerable strain to act likewise. She must know that what had happened was the reverse of dreadful, and she must know that he knew she knew it. Ah, well, she'd get over that in time, no doubt.

The butler reappeared presently, and at his nod Ammiel went into the library.

MR. JERROLD was seated at the end of a huge carved walnut table, of the Italian renaissance, partly covered by an exquisite bit of Gobelin tapestry. He was somewhat out of key with his surroundings, in that he had removed his coat and his collar, and his feet were incased in slippers of great shabbiness and manifest comfort. He dropped his newspaper and rose, peering myopically over his spectacles. "Hullo!" he said, with neither warmth nor hostility in his tone. "Jansen said you want to see *me*."

"And Jansen, strangely enough, was correct," answered Ammiel, as he seated himself in the chair his host indicated with a jerk of his head. Then he hesitated. Now that he was here, he experienced a certain embarrassment in stating his mission. "I—I saw one of your billboards—"

For the first time Mr. Jerrold exhibited animation. "The new one? 'Make your kisses mean something'? What'd you think of it?"

"It made me think of you," answered Ammiel truthfully. But at the expression on the other's face, he added hastily: "I mean, it made me think I ought to see you."

"Well, you're seeing me," said Mr. Jerrold bluntly. "What can I do for you?"

The suspicious truculence of Jerrold's manner nettled Ammiel. "You can't do anything for me," he said coldly. "But you can do something for your daughter."

"My daughter?" echoed Mr. Jerrold in surprise.

"Yes. Look here." In a sudden flood of words, Ammiel told the story of Padgett's predicament, and his own scheme of rescue.

"Let me get this straight," said Mr. Jerrold, with no show of emotion. He removed his glasses and wiped them with great deliberateness. "Let me get this straight," he said again—it was the only indication that he was not altogether master of himself. "As I understand it, you propose to subsidize Douglas during the completion of his education, and while he's getting a start."

"Just so."

Mr. Jerrold was silent for a moment. "A thousand a year for five years, eh? Why did you set that figure?"

"Well, I could make it fifteen hundred for three years and a half. Or—"

"Yes, but why the five thousand total?"

"It's all I've got," said Ammiel.

MR. JERROLD continued to stare noncommittally, his round face and sallow complexion making him look like some oriental figure carved out of wood. "I'll be damned!" he exploded suddenly.

"It is—a—little unusual," admitted Ammiel.

Mr. Jerrold was a man of direct speech, except when it suited his purposes to be otherwise. "I must say, defeated rivals don't act like that in the books that I've read!"

Ammiel smiled. "According to the books I ought to be trailing him with a gun, eh?"

There was no answering smile from Mr. Jerrold. "I seem to understand your scheme so far. But what have I got to do with it?"

Ammiel did not mind the hostility in the question. He was relieved that there was no derision. He began to understand why Mr. Jerrold was successful. Evidently, he examined things with an unprejudiced eye. "Why," he said earnestly, "I want you to take stock in the company. We've got to raise Padgett's salary."

"You need more capital, eh?" There was the faintest suggestion of a quiver at the corners of Mr. Jerrold's mouth.

"Exactly!"

"But suppose—hem—suppose I preferred him in business with me?"

Ammiel dismissed that as an objection of no consequence. "He'll never be worth a cent in business," he said succinctly. "I know. I've lived with him."

"Do you realize, young man," said Mr. Jerrold after a short pause, "that you're—just a little impertinent in proposing this to me? Don't you suppose I know best what's best for my daughter?"

"That's beside the point, Mr. Jerrold. Look here." Very patiently, he went over the arguments he had used with Padgett. "Why, it's so simple! You want your daughter to be happy, don't you? You know that a good deal of happiness can be bought. And you know there's nothing worse in God's world than a man who hates his job. Of course, if you kick off soon enough, Padge can do his silly architecture and Phyll will be happy. But you may keep your health a long time—you *look* sound enough." He surveyed his host critically.

For the first time Mr. Jerrold's reserve left him, and he grinned broadly. "You don't mind talking turkey, do you, son! Well, I don't either. You're right. I am sound. And I'm still young enough so's I don't shy at a new idea. Say, what do your folks think of you, anyhow?"

"They think I'm crazy," answered Ammiel promptly.

Mr. Jerrold nodded. "A lot o' people have said that about me, one time or another. But I'm not. And you're not—not altogether. Hum—well, let me think about it. I never decide things at night. Make too many mistakes at night. But I'll call you up one of these days. We'll have another talk. You—well, I think you and I'd get on pretty well together. I—" He coughed, covering an unexpected confusion.

Ammiel understood what he meant. "I'm sorry, too," he said softly. "But Doug's worth ten of me—honest!"

Mr. Jerrold went out with him to the front door. "Good night, lad. Glad you thought of me."

"It pays to advertise, doesn't it?" laughed Ammiel, as he turned to go.

"Say!" Mr. Jerrold put his hand on his arm. "Just what made you think of this—scheme of yours, anyway?"

Ammiel looked out at the stars, just visible above the tree tops. "I'm quite sure I don't know," he said thoughtfully.

CECILY SPOTTSWOOD pushed the breakfast things away from her bed and languidly raised herself to consider the morning's mail. There would be nothing interesting, of course. Bills, chiefly. She wished Stephen would provide her with a secretary to handle all these matters. A woman in her condition really ought not to be expected to do it.

One after another she slit the envelopes, and after a glance at the contents put them aside. A good many, she noted with indifference, were statements—one bore a rather impertinent notation on the corner. She sighed wearily. Mabel Whitworth, they said, paid her bills quarterly. She wished she were wealthy enough for that. It would save so much time.

Near the bottom of the pile was an envelope addressed to her in printed lead pencil. She viewed it with disfavor. Why didn't people put their names and addresses on their envelopes? It would save so much unnecessary opening.

Listlessly, she ran her finger under the flap, and opened the single sheet of note paper within. One seeing her as she read it would have observed a curious change in her manner. The color rose in her cheeks, until they were more vivid than the ribbons in her boudoir cap. All her lethargy had gone, in its place was a tense amazement. Suddenly, with an exclamation of disgust, she threw the missive on the floor. After a thoughtful moment, she picked it up and studied it again. It was unsigned, and the characters, crudely printed, gave no clue. The envelope bore a downtown postmark.

"How perfectly silly!" She leaned back against the pillows, and her voice rose in an uncertain little laugh. "Stephen—carrying on with a chorus girl! It's too absurd!"

This thought, repeated at intervals with variations, satisfied her for some time, until she realized that she was thinking of Stephen as her husband, not as Stephen, himself. The charge in the anonymous letter had constituted a reflection upon herself, and was therefore to be disdained. *Her* husband did not have liaisons with actresses. Though she did not phrase it in so many words, her thought was that she did not marry that sort of husband.

That this was a defensive idea, she recognized. Placed on the defensive, she resorted to argument. Stephen was not that kind of man. She laughed again, but still more uncertainly. Upright, earnest, stupid Stephen—it was too absurd! But the note, with its malicious innuendo, continued to lie before her, and the tears crept into her eyes. She suffered enough, she told herself plaintively, without having things like this added to it.

When the cook came to see her about the ordering, she declared herself too ill to consider it. She took her temperature, and finding it normal, decided that the instrument was faulty, and had the maid telephone to the drugstore for a new one. Her heart, she discovered, was behaving peculiarly. She wondered if she ought not to call up Dr. Taplow.

The newspaper lay at her side unread. All through the morning she pondered on the anonymous note. Her first thought was to toss it away, as beneath consideration. But though it did go into the waste-basket twice it was twice rescued. When Stephen came home, she would show it to him, of course, and they would both have a good laugh over it. The ridiculous thing! And yet, somehow, she could not quite picture herself discussing it with Stephen. He was so frightfully literal. He might not laugh at all.

The longer she pondered, the clearer it became that the note could not be ignored. It had been written by some one with a vengeful purpose. There was more malice where this came from. She covered her face, whimpering miserably. She was such a frail, helpless creature to cope with such a problem. She needed advice, some one to take the load off her slender shoulders. she hesitated awhile, and then telephoned to the doctor.

DR. TAPLOW came in, brusque and obviously unsympathetic. She wondered how so harsh a man could enjoy any practice at all. "What is it today, Cecily—heart?" he inquired.

She nodded, more from force of habit than from conviction. "I don't feel very well this morning."

"You look uncommonly well," he replied, taking her wrist. "Hum—why did you call me? I told you not to unless you were dying, at least."

Everybody's Magazine, February, 1925

Her eyes clouded. "I—I'm in trouble. I suppose I'm as well as I'll ever be. But—look." She handed him the mysterious letter. "It's ridiculous, of course," she added, as she watched his bushy eyebrows contract. "But I thought I ought to talk to somebody about it."

"Why not Stephen?" he demanded. "He'd be the one, I should think."

Her eyes narrowed shrewdly. "Do you—really think so?"

The doctor scratched his grizzled chin, looking at the ceiling. He was thinking of a number of things, stray bits of gossip, matters of his own knowledge, phrases that Ammiel had let drop—all suddenly coming together like the letters in a motion-picture title. He whistled softly.

"What are you thinking?" queried Cecily anxiously.

"Give me that letter," said the doctor gruffly. "I have an idea of getting to the bottom of this."

"And finding who wrote it?"

He nodded. "Perhaps. Meanwhile—forget it."

She smiled tolerantly. "A woman doesn't forget—such things."

He rose, putting the document into an already overstuffed pocket. "All right. Get out and take a walk. It's a very fine day."

Cecily sighed, turning her face to the wall. "I don't think I shall get up today," she said weakly. "I—I'm rather upset."

"Hum—yes, no doubt. Well, I have a number of people to see who really need attention. Good morning."

Before she could make a fitting reply, he had gone. Her weakness left her and she sat upright. "Disagreeable old tyrant!" she exclaimed, shaking her fist at the door which had closed behind him.

Outside, the doctor was doing some very concentrated thinking. And a little later Ammiel was interrupted in the midst of a sales conference, by a telephone call from Dr. Taplow.

"But I was giving myself a treat tonight," he complained. "I was going to a movie show."

"You're not," answered the doctor sternly. "You're coming to see me."

For a person who had planned a life of complete detachment, he was finding his hours unduly crowded, reflected Ammiel as he hung up the receiver. He had become so occupied with doing that he no longer had the time to think. "Where were we?" he asked. "Oh, yes! Well, the Supreme Court has determined that a resale price can be established. I don't see how the Federal Trade Commission . . ."

WHEN evening came, he found himself in Dr. Taplow's old leather armchair—a little shabbier, with a distressing tendency to crumble at the corners and leave brown marks on one's clothes, but still the most comfortable chair in all the world. "Well, what now?"

Without comment, the doctor handed him Cecily's anonymous note.

He read it, his eyebrows puckering. "Nice story! But where do *I* come in? It's none of my business, is it?"

"With Jonas away, you're the only other male Spottswood," said the doctor briefly.

Ammiel was silent. "My brothers are giving me a lot of trouble. Gosh—d'you suppose it's true?"

The doctor merely shrugged his shoulders.

"Elsie Collins," said Ammiel thoughtfully. "Who's she?"

"Never heard of her."

Ammiel lit a cigarette and puffed at it silently for a few moments. "Maybe—it's just a political trick. Steve's going to run for Congress, and maybe—"

"Maybe!" said the doctor dryly.

"You've got your own ideas, haven't you, Dr. Tap?"

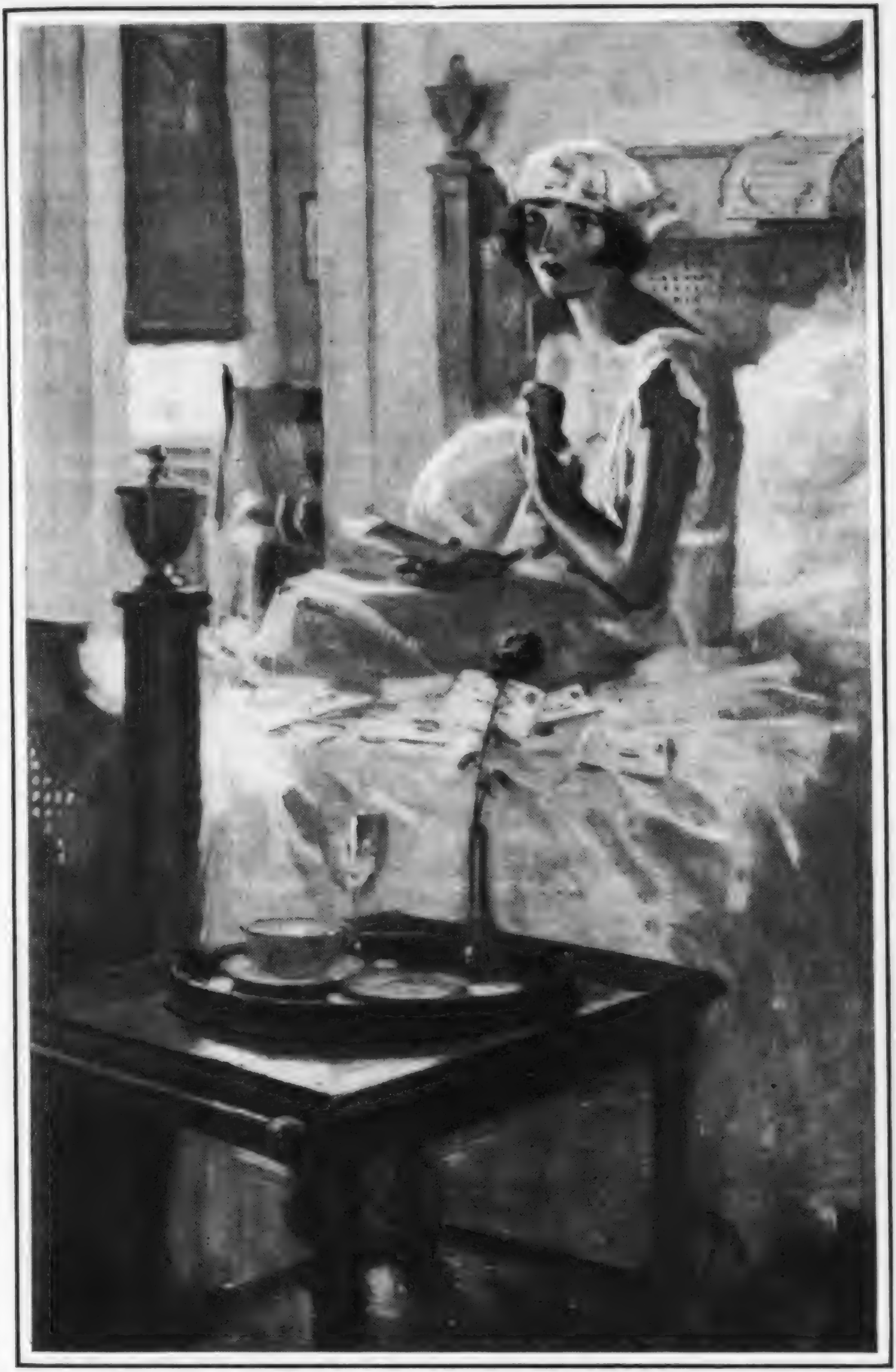
The physician slowly nodded. "I've known both of them their whole lives through. And though I be a bachelor, I know somewhat of marriage."

"And that," said Ammiel with a little laugh, "is all you're going to say? You'll pass the little buck to me."

The physician nodded again.

Ammiel rose and stretched himself. "Well, what's one tangle more or less? Between trying to keep old Padge from making a mess of his life, and keeping a busted business out of the hands of the sheriff, and a few other little odd jobs on the side, you want me in this, too. You're a nice fellow, Dr. Tap. You'll be having me in a worse breakdown than Cecily ever thought of having."

For reply the doctor took the younger man by both arms and looked into his



"How perfectly silly!" Cecily's voice rose in an uncertain little laugh. "Stephen—carrying on with a chorus girl! It's too absurd!"

eyes. "Tell me, lad: are you any less happy than you were a year ago?"

"I don't know," answered Ammiel with a short laugh. "I don't have time to think about it."

The doctor gave him a little push. "Then you're in no danger of a breakdown."

That, reflected Ammiel as he walked home, was something of a paradox. It was rather puzzling. Cecily lay surrounded by medicaments and books on how to get well, because she had no occupation. And Jonas had cracked because he was occupied too much. Perhaps it was not work or the lack of it that made the souls of men and women crumble. It was another thing, he decided. It was fear. He could recall no instance of a man suffering that mysterious blight "shell-shock" in the midst of an attack. But he recalled one who had succumbed while they were in a quiet sector near Lunéville. The chap had gone clean out of his head thinking of the shell that might get him. He remembered a Frenchman's remark that the quiet sectors—were the stamping ground of *cafard*.

It was fear that had got Jonas. It was fear that kept Cecily prostrate. It was fear that made Padgett thrust a knife into his spiritual heart. Fear of discovery, fear of life, fear of what "people would say"—eventually, no doubt, some sort of fear would take possession of *him*, too. Meanwhile, there were things to be done—rather delicate things. . . .

In the morning, he went directly to Stephen's office. To the latter's surprise at the visit, he offered no reply, merely handing him the anonymous communication with a brief: "What's the answer, Steve?"

He watched his brother carefully while the latter read it. He noticed the latter's high color slowly recede, to return in a sudden flush of angry purple.

"Where'd you get this?" demanded Stephen.

With no waste of words, Ammiel told him.

Stephen was silent, biting his lip. "Why didn't Cecily tell me?" he muttered, adding, bitterly: "She seems to have told everybody else."

"Nobody knows but Dr. Tap," said Ammiel quietly. "And he's not a talker."

"Impertinent old busybody," growled Stephen wrathfully. "He's told *you*, hasn't he? What did he do that for?"

"I'm sure I don't know," answered Ammiel quite truthfully. "I told him it was none of my business. He seemed to think it was."

STEPHEN continued to stare in a kind of fascination at the letter on his desk. "I can't understand Cecily—not saying anything about it. You don't suppose—she thinks there's anything in it?"

"Is there?"

"What d'you mean—is there?" Stephen raised his head truculently. But his eyes wavered and sank before the calm inquiry in those of his brother. "Of course there isn't! What nonsense!"

"I thought it might be some political dirty work," suggested Ammiel softly.

Stephen clutched at the straw. "That's just what it is," he cried. "They'll stoop to anything in politics. Blackguards!"

Ammiel lighted a cigarette in apparent unconcern. "I thought I might hunt up this Elsie Collins."

"Oh, don't do that!" exclaimed Stephen in consternation.

"Why not?" Ammiel raised his eyebrows in bland surprise. "She might throw some light on the mystery."

"No—no! You mustn't do that. It—it wouldn't be wise. Really it wouldn't!"

Ammiel, watching his brother, saw the perspiration start on the latter's face. He saw, too, that his right hand was squeezing the fingers of the left until the knuckles showed white.

"You—you know Elsie Collins?" he asked suddenly.

Stephen's head inclined in a faint nod. "Er—slightly."

Ammiel was silent for a moment. Then he leaned over, grinding out the end of his cigarette. "It would be a good idea, I think," he observed, in a matter-of-fact tone, "if you would come clean."

Stephen tried to meet the challenge. "What d'you mean?" he stormed. "Are you implying that I'm not telling the truth?"

"I'm practically certain of it," answered Ammiel calmly. "You show all the symptoms."

"Why, you—"

Ammiel rose and put his arm around his brother. "Come clean, Stevie," he urged gently. "Maybe I can help."

Stephen made no answer. He left the desk and went to the window, where he stood with his hands thrust deep in his pockets. After a long time he turned around. His head was raised, and the pallor of his skin accentuated his fine-cut features. "In my experience of the law," he said in a hoarse voice, which shook a little, "I find that the instinct for confession—well, every man has to make confession, sooner or later."

"GO ON, Stevie," urged Ammiel, when his brother choked and halted.

Stephen closed his eyes momentarily, and his face was chiseled with lines of anguish. "You're the one person that has no illusions about me. That night in Paris—you've never mentioned it—but you know."

"I guess most everybody's got something he likes to keep the shades pulled down on," said Ammiel soothingly.

Stephen pointed a trembling finger at the letter on his desk. "I don't know who wrote that. It doesn't matter. But it's true. Lord! And it's only a part of what might be told. Only a part."

With a shudder, he groped for a chair, and sank into it. In a dry monotone, as if the fire of his emotion were quite spent, he went on. He seemed to be speaking his innermost thoughts aloud, unconscious of any auditor.

"I crave applause the way some people crave drink. And I'm vain—oh, terribly! That's why I get into so many things. I like to be in the limelight. I pretend to be modest, but I love people talking about me, and shaking my hand, and telling me what a great fellow I am. I've always been that way. I like to be popular. And I want affection. I'm like a cat. I've got to have somebody fussing over me. I can't help it. God knows I've fought against it. But that's the way I'm made.

"All our laws, our moral system, the way we talk—the whole thing's framed just as if we were reasoning beings. But we aren't. People see me, sitting here in this office, and they think that's the real me. But it's only a part—a tiny part. There's such a lot more. I get so lonesome and tired—just *thinking*. And the feeling part of me keeps whispering and crowding—harder and harder—until something has to give. Oh, it's all so dirty—so rotten! Lord! You have no idea how I loathe myself! A filthy sham. What's it all coming to, Ammiel? What is there in life for a mess like me?"

"I don't know," said Ammiel from his heart.

Stephen sighed tremulously. "If I wreck only myself, that doesn't matter. But the disgrace to the family. Poor mother! And old Jonas. And Cecily—you won't understand it, I guess—but I care for her more than any woman I've ever known. It's killing to go on lying to her, as lie I must."

"Do you think she—suspects?"

SOMETHING like a smile twisted the corners of Stephen's mouth. But it faded quickly, and a shadow of pain succeeded it. "I don't think she thinks enough of me to suspect. Cecily lost her taste for me long ago. Maybe that's the trouble. Perhaps, if she'd kept her health, things might have been different. We started out so well—better than most, I think. And look how we're finishing. Well, I suppose that's the way life is: you start all fresh and shiny, and then the edges get nicked, and finally the whole thing falls apart. It's too bad."

Ammiel was silent, because a lump was in his throat that kept him from speaking; and besides, he had nothing to say.

Stephen, by a manifest effort, regained a kind of composure. "I imagine this filthy letter was sent by some one who knows Elsie," he said in a voice more nearly like his own. "The only thing we can do is ignore it, I think."

"You can't ignore it," said Ammiel bluntly. "It's somebody with a grudge against you—or her. They'll be coming back again—and stronger. Tell me one more thing: has this Collins person any hold on you?"

Stephen hesitated a moment. And then, as if he had resolved to make his confession complete, he told the whole story. "I've been weak, of course," he added, his eyes averted. "A prime fool. A man always is in such a fix."

"It's quite a fix," agreed Ammiel doubtfully. But it was only a moment before his face cleared and he rose from his chair. "But fixes are made to be fixed. It looks as if Ammiel had another job on his hands. Well—to horse, men. The bugle sounds!"

"What are you going to do?" asked Stephen doubtfully.

"I'm sure I don't know. I'll ask this Elsie person about that."

"You're not—"

Ammiel nodded. "Since she seems the most authentic nigger in the woodpile, I guess I'll pay her a call."

Before Stephen's alarmed protest could take voice, the door had closed upon his brother.

Ammiel's quality of understanding sympathy carries him far. But the Collins person proves to be a handful even for him—in March EVERYBODY'S, out February 14.

Coming in March

Besides the new serial, "The Great Samara," by E. Phillips Oppenheim (see announcement on page 130), and the complete novel, "Conquest," by Jay Gelzer (see page 20), there will be—

Seven Short Stories

Broadway Forever — By Gayne Dexter
Milton Glaze, star-maker of the movies, experiments with matrimony

Hypostasia — By Ralph Barstow
Startling adventures in the realm of psychology

Canned Salmon — By Stephen Vincent Benet
Amusing satire: a Main Street turns Bohemian

The White Pigeon — By Prosper Buranelli
Cesare, singer of small parts in grand opera, parades as a bird of a finer feather

The Sporting Thing to Do — By Lucian Cary
A mental hazard handicaps Jimmy McLean in tennis and a game of hearts

Mayes — By Captain Dingle
A tropic calm strips life aboard a festering horse-ship to its brutal realities

The Hair of the Dog — By Arthur Mills
Algernon Forcet, impervious to a woman's wiles, overlooks one spot in his armor

And further instalments of two serials: "March Winds," by Francis R. Bellamy, and "The Phantom Caravan," by Howard Vincent O'Brien

March *EVERYBODY'S* Out February 14

Dr. Goodrich, Scientist-Detective

The Subconscious Witness

A Mysterious Automobile Death That Baffled the Latest Scientific Methods of the Criminologist

By Stoddard Goodhue

"IT IS said to be a wise child that knows its own father," Dr. Goodrich commented. "It would certainly be a wise father that could establish a claim to paternity, or disprove a charge of it, by a blood test."

The physician was smiling quizzically. "Jesting aside," he continued, "the thing can't be done at the present state of our knowledge—which is fortunate or unfortunate according to the point of view one happens to hold."

"But there are different types of blood," I demurred. "No one makes a blood transfusion nowadays without first finding out whether the prospective donor has the same type of blood as the recipient. When bloods of different types are mixed, the corpuscles stick together or dissolve, and the very deuce is to pay."

"Of course. But that has nothing to do with the paternity matter. It has been proved that a child may have blood of a different type from that of its mother, let alone its father. Whatever the chemical conditions may be that determine the different types, they are not directly heritable. I'm afraid the case you speak about can't be settled with the aid of the microscope alone."

As he spoke, the examiner had taken up a little rack of test-tubes that stood on the table before him. He inspected the tubes critically, and nodded as if in approval.

"If the blood tests fail in the case you mention," he said, "fortunately there are other questions they can answer for us. These test-tubes furnish a case in point. Do you note the little flocculent deposit, like so much undissolved snow, in this tube here, and in this other one, and this, and this?"

I nodded assent.

"And these other tubes, as you will agree, are perfectly clear."

Again I assented.

"Well, these are all specimens of blood—human blood. But they came from different sources. Even the four specimens that give the precipitate are not from the same subject. All of them are from known individuals. One of these individuals has committed a crime—homicide, to be exact—whereas the other three have done nothing, so far as I know, that brings them within my official purview. But the difficulty is that this test-tube experiment doesn't tell me 'which from t'other,' so to speak."

"Tell me about it," I urged.

The examiner hesitated a moment, stroking his chin. "There isn't much more to tell just yet," he said presently. "However, what you see in these tubes—just the faint little cloudiness—is not without importance, for it does serve to exonerate no fewer than six people of suspicion of having committed a certain crime, while at the same time involving four other persons."

THE quizzical smile that is so much in evidence whenever Dr. Goodrich propounds something especially puzzling played across his features now as he added:

"Only, as I just told you, I do not know which individual in the group of four is the guilty one. To find that out, I must leave the test-tubes and fall back on another line of experiment. And that, as it happens, will interest you; for it concerns the very kind of blood-test that we were just talking about—the one by which the paternity of the child was supposed to be determined in that California case."

"But you have just condemned that test."

"For the purpose of establishing relationship of father and child, yes. Or any other relationship. But the establishment of individual identity is another matter. Our case is this: We have four persons brought under suspicion by the result of the test-tube experiment. One of the four has committed a murder. All the individuals are known, and I have specimens of the blood of all of them. I have also a specimen of blood from the murder weapon. It has been tested and found to belong to type three. Now I am going to test the blood of the four suspected individuals. When we find out which types they respectively belong to, we shall perhaps be a step forwarder."

"Unless all your suspects should be found to belong to type three," I interrupted.

"Just so," said the examiner genially, already leaning over his microscope. "But that," he added, "is rather unlikely, inasmuch as there are four possible types into which they may fall. However, we shall see what we shall see."

FOR a few minutes the microscopist worked in silence. With deft precision he manipulated the pipettes of blood and the glass slides on which different specimens were mixed; then one slide after another was placed on the stand of the microscope and subjected to careful scrutiny. There was nothing in the observer's expression or manner to indicate whether what he was seeing met his expectations. But presently he appeared to have finished his quest, for he pushed the microscope a little to one side and looked at me across the glass-topped table, holding one of the slides toward me as if for my inspection.

"Mechanically speaking," he said, "this is a very simple test. You have merely to mix a droplet of each of two samples of blood and watch the corpuscles under the microscope. If the two specimens of blood are of the same type, the corpuscles intermingle, and nothing tangible happens. If, on the other hand, they are of different types, a chemical battle ensues, with the result that many of the corpuscles are dissolved. That is all. And yet, in its implications, this simple experiment seems to me to be one of the most profoundly suggestive tests ever made in the entire range of scientific inquiry."

A MOMENTARY pause. Then came the explication that I eagerly awaited. It concerned, as I anticipated, philosophical rather than practical aspects of the subject. Dr. Goodrich was using the test to aid in detecting a criminal; but for the moment his major interest lay in another direction. He was considering a problem in human personality.

"It is utterly beyond credence, is it not," he demanded, "that the personality of an individual human being should be stamped on a particle of matter so minute and so seemingly insignificant as a blood corpuscle? Consider the case. There are, as you know, about five million red corpuscles in a cubic millimeter of normal blood. And there are a million cubic millimeters in a liter, and about six liters of blood in an average human body. Let us see where that lands us."

A moment later a row of figures had been jotted across the margin of a card the center of which bore graded colors for testing the color of blood specimens, and the examiner, checking over the ciphers, commented:

"Nice row of figures, isn't it? With six liters of blood in the body, and five million red corpuscles to the cubic millimeter, we get an aggregate corpuscle population spread clear across the sheet here, with—let us see—seventeen figures to represent it. That reads 'thirty quadrillions,' I believe. Of course quadrillions don't mean anything to anybody, but if the total human population of the globe is estimated at only about one and three-quarters billion, we can make a comparison that will at least be suggestive. The simple computation shows us that there are, in general terms, sixteen million times as many red corpuscles in an average human body as there are human beings in the world.

"To go still further, a few more pencil strokes, if you care to make them, will convince you that the aggregate population of the globe, in all the successive generations of the million years or so since the human race came into being, does not equal the corpuscle population of each and every one of the human beings."

"I'LL take your word for it," I conceded. "But what has all that to do with your microscopic test?"

The physician waved his hand expressively. "Why, simply this," he said. "Each and every corpuscle, of all the quadrillions, would appear to have its individual personality—its likes and dislikes, if you will. The proof is found in the fact that each corpuscle can abide mingling with corpuscles only of its own type. All the corpuscles in any given human organism are of one type, and there is no clear evidence that the type in any given case ever changes, from cradle to grave. Between the members of one group and any other there are profound and ineradicable differences, making mutual intermingling impossible; yet these differences are in no wise accounted for by anything we know of heredity or evolution. Doesn't that all seem mysterious and wonderful?"

"It does indeed," I readily admitted. "But turning from generals to particulars, what does the test you have just made reveal concerning the personalities of the corpuscles of these four people whom you are trailing?"

Dr. Goodrich eyed me tolerantly, and drew a deep breath. His appearance was that of one who suddenly recalls a forgotten project. But his next remark showed that the data connected with the task in hand had been only pigeonholed, by no means forgotten.

"Well, things might be worse," he commented reflectively. "All the specimens might be, as you have cheerfully suggested, of one type, which would help us not at all. But it isn't as bad as that. One specimen falls in group one, and another in group two. So those two people are eliminated—exonerated of any suspicion. But the two other specimens fall in group three. One or the other of the persons that furnished those specimens is guilty. But there is nothing in the test to show which one. We are down to two suspects, which is a big reduction from the original ten. The test-tube and the microscope have done that: but they do not tell me which of the two type three is the particular culprit I am seeking. To determine that, I must find yet another test."

"How about that good old-fashioned one, the third degree?" I ventured.

The examiner shook his head. "That," he said, "would be of very doubtful utility indeed, because all that can be hoped from it is the exaction of a confession; and in this case there is probably no one who could possibly confess."

I pondered this cryptic remark, and admitted myself beaten. "I don't get it," I said presently. "Why could not the criminal confess if he wished to do so?"

"For the simple but adequate reason that he—or she, for one of the two remaining suspects is a woman—probably has no recollection of having committed the overt act. All the members of the party—of both parties, for that matter—were a good deal more than half seas over; and no one of them appears to be able to give a clear account of any of the events associated with the crime. Several of them were undoubtedly unconscious for some time after the accident. Others were partially sobered by the shock. But both of my present suspects were still in a dazed condition for some hours afterward. As to that, there is ample evidence."

I realized now that the examiner was divulging, in the roundabout way that often pleases him, the nature of the particular crime that he was investigating. His reference to an "accident" in the same breath with mention of the "overt act," coupled with the comments on the condition of the participants, left in my mind no room for doubt that the case was one that had been featured so much in the newspaper headlines.

THE essentials of the story, as I now passed them in mental review, were these: There had been a head-on collision late one night on the Coney Island road. A big touring-car, with seven passengers, had apparently swung too far into the center of the road as it met a closed four-passenger car, and the result, curiously, had been more disastrous for the big car than for the little one.

The passengers were spilled in every

direction more or less indiscriminately, in the midst of broken glass and general wreckage; but by a miracle all but one were still alive when help arrived, though several were badly cut and bruised, and nearly all were in a dazed condition.

The one individual who had lost his life was the owner of the touring-car, the well-known broker, Jason Bettersee. It appeared that he himself had been at the wheel of the big car, and so had been directly responsible for the accident. The impact had thrown him free of the car, well over to one side of the road, where his body was found face-down, the crushed skull apparently accounting for the unfortunate fatality.

The morning papers contained no hint of anything beyond the apparent facts just cited. It was noted that Bettersee's wife, who was said to have sat beside her husband, had escaped serious injury, though she was severly bruised, and suffered from shock. The other members of the party included several men and women fairly well known in social and financial circles. They had been bound, it was supposed, for a week-end party at Bettersee's country place on the south shore.

This from the morning papers. But by by the time the later editions of the evening papers appeared, there began to be rumors that things were not quite as they had at first seemed. In the first place, some reportorial sleuth had discovered that the Bettersee car had not been headed eastward at the time of the accident, but had been coming toward town, just as was the other car; and that the accident had been due not to head-on collision, but to impact of the forward right-hand wheel of the big car with the forward left-hand wheel of the smaller one it was passing.

The big car had apparently veered suddenly to the right, just as it passed; and the impact, combined perhaps with a sharp application of the emergency brake, had swung the body of the vehicle about so that it finally stopped, partly overturned, headed in nearly the opposite direction from that in which it had been going. The smaller car, which apparently had been traveling slowly, had its hood smashed in a way to suggest head-on impact, which was natural enough in view of the actual character of the catastrophe.

This new evidence made the reporter question whether the driver of the big car had intended to cut into the small car in passing. Bettersee was known as a skilful driver, and it was hard to believe that he could have misjudged his distance on that open stretch of road sufficiently to hit the other car, there being abundant leeway for passing.

Such a surmise, however, would doubtless have come to nothing had not the reportorial interviews led to another revelation: Bettersee's young and beautiful wife, who according to first reports had been at his side in the touring-car, had in reality been a member of the company of four in the small car.

The two groups of motorists, it now appeared, had not been together during the evening; and Mrs. Bettersee herself was the only member of the smaller company who was personally known to any surviving member of the other group.

As to whether Bettersee himself could have known that his wife was touring in that part of the world with another party, no one could surmise. Certainly it seemed highly improbable that he could have known that she was in that particular car since even at that hour cars were not infrequently encountered.

But naturally enough the reporter put a pin there. Indeed, he put a good many pins there, each indicating a possible clue to a scandal that would change the entire complexion of the "accident," which had threatened to prove good for only a few columns of copy.

VERY quickly, intelligent suspicion had its reward. As the reporter was scouting about, in the region of the disaster, he discovered something at the side of the road that made his heart leap for joy—or come as near to it as the heart of so experienced a sleuth is able to do. The "something" was nothing more nor less than an ordinary automobile wrench. But this particular wrench not only lay twenty or thirty feet off at the side of the roadway, where it could scarcely have come unless hurled with vigor; but it was covered with blotches that the most casual inspection revealed as blood stains.

Young Melville—that was the reporter's name—had the caution to take up the wrench only with gloved fingers and to wrap it carefully in a newspaper, in case it might bear telltale finger-prints. Then he hurried to the local hospital where the body of Bettersee still lay. By proper manipulation of official strings, he obtained permission to inspect the body.

In two minutes he knew that the dead man's skull had been crushed in by some implement of just about the size and shape of the automobile wrench that was stored in his inside coat pocket. And when he left the hospital he was walking on air. He scented the biggest beat of his hectic career.

The story got better and better, from the reporter's viewpoint, as the investigation progressed. Expert medical examination, now that it was directed properly, left no doubt that Bettersee's death was due to cranial fracture from impact of the wrench—or some implement of identical size and shape—upon the back of his head, presumably as he lay unconscious in the road.

The man had been murdered. Some one had seized the opportunity to take the broker's life, under circumstances that gave every prospect of effectively hiding the murder behind the appearance of accidental death.

But who could have done it? Obviously it must be some member of one or the other group involved in the wreck. But which individual? As to that, fortunately there was no direct evidence—otherwise a splendid mystery would have been solved all too soon.

SUGGESTIVE clues were not lacking. Several divergent ones, fortunately. And all were of such character as to add piquancy to the case, and give it front-page significance.

First, there was the salient fact that Mrs. Bettersee, much younger than her husband, and of a temperament none too domestic, was rumored to have given cause for gossip at least, through association with companions not all to her husband's liking. Second, it was distinctly more than rumored that Bettersee himself had carried on an affair with a woman whose husband had threatened divorce proceedings in consequence—though the matter had been hushed up.

And to make the thing quite perfect—from the standpoint of public interest, of course—it was revealed that the company in which Mrs. Bettersee was disporting herself on the fatal evening included the outraged husband of Bettersee's inamorata; her particular escort, however, being a young man-about-town with whom gossip had previously linked her name rather intimately.

In all this I am only giving a condensed transcript of the mélange of fact and gossip with which the newspapers had been filled for a week or so prior to my visit to Dr. Goodrich's office. These things flashed through my mind as I now realized the import of the blood tests that the examiner had been making.

OBVIOUSLY enough, the six persons whom the physician referred to as having been exonerated of suspicion by the test-tube experiment were the members of Bettersee's party, in the big car. The four persons under suspicion were as obviously the members of the other company.

I learned now that the test-tube experiment had been one with which I was already familiar, in which blood from the wrench that had been used as a murder weapon was tested for certain proteins, notably that of lobster, of which food the occupants of the smaller car were known to have partaken freely, at a shore dinner, a few hours previous to the enigmatic catastrophe.

As the test was positive, and as the occupants of the big car had not dined at the shore—nor eaten lobster elsewhere, as careful inquiry showed—this test assured Dr. Goodrich that the person whose blood stained the handle of the wrench was in the smaller party. But it gave no information beyond that, inasmuch as all four of the occupants of the wrecked car were cut and scratched from contact with shattered glass of the car windows.

I have already related that the physician had instituted a second blood test, this time using specimens gained directly from the four possible suspects, and compared with the specimen from the murder weapon; proving that two of the four individuals had blood of the type of that found on the wrench—and at the same time exonerating the other two individuals.

Dr. Goodrich presently revealed, in response to a specific inquiry from me, that the two suspects left, after the other eight had been eliminated, were Mrs. Bettersee herself and the man—named Burton—whose wife had been the misdemeanant associated by gossip and innuendo with Bettersee's philandering.

"So far as motives are concerned," said the physician, "Burton seems a very favorable subject. Certainly he had reason to hate Bettersee, and it is a plausible enough guess that he would avail himself of such an opportunity—particularly when under the influence of liquor. But all that of course does not prove that Burton is guilty. There are plenty of reasons why Mrs. Bettersee might feel unamiably inclined toward her spouse. And she also was right on the spot. Hence the complications of my problem."

"It is indeed a problem," I said. "It would be hard to suggest a more interesting one. As I understand you, the second blood test shows that both Burton and Mrs. Bettersee have blood of the same type as that found on the weapon we know was used in the murder?"

The physician nodded. "Both number three," he said. "That places the crime on one or the other of them, but leaves us with no manner of determining which—so far as that blood test is concerned. I may add that, as both have normal blood, there is no other blood test known that can give us further aid. So far as that line of investigation is concerned, we find ourselves at an impasse."

I meditated a moment, and recalled another line of investigation in which Dr. Goodrich is an expert. I felt sure that he was thinking of the same thing. Presently I said:

"So far as I can see, there is only one other thing open to you."

"YES," he replied, I thought rather regretfully. "I have gone over the matter carefully, and I see no escape. I would rather not resort to that particular method, but I appear to be driven to it. I anticipated as much, and that was one reason why I welcomed your coming this evening. I do not want to make the test alone, of course; and there is no one else I would care to have present. For if things are as I expect to find them, I shall probably be inclined to act—or fail to act—in a way that some of my legal colleagues might not approve. And I wish to have entire freedom of choice."

"I think I know what you mean," I replied, "and I sympathize with your intention, as I forecast it. Anyhow, I need hardly tell you that whatever I see falls within the scope of professional privilege, and will go no further without your full approval."

"I understand that fully," said the examiner. "And now I think we will go to work, without further ado. I had sent for Mrs. Bettersee before you came, and I think she is waiting in the outer office. I will summon her, and we shall see what we shall see."

I shall describe very briefly what followed. Mrs. Bettersee proved to be as beautiful and as appealing as her published pictures—with an added charm of manner and wistfulness of expression that the photographer failed to catch. Her large dark eyes regarded Dr. Goodrich almost appealingly as she declared that she had no recollection whatever of what had transpired after the "dreadful crash."

"I believe you," said the physician, in kindly tones. "And I think I can help you to attain a peace of mind that you now lack if you will coöperate with me in a mental test that at worst can do you no harm."

"I will gladly do whatever you ask," she replied earnestly.

"I AM going to ask you merely to go into a condition of hypnotic receptiveness," the physician told her, "in which you will perhaps reveal things that you have yourself forgotten. But these things, let me assure you, will be regarded by myself and by my friend here, who is also a physician, as falling behind the veil of professional secrecy. Understanding that, do you agree to the test?"

For an instant she hesitated. Then she looked up quickly.

"Anything is better than the dreadful uncertainty that now oppresses me," she declared. "Whatever you think best, I willingly agree to."

The physician gravely inclined his head. Then he held up one hand impressively, asked the patient to fix her eyes on it intently, and presently began to intone the banal phrases used by the hypnotist, ending with the declaration:

"You are going to sleep. . . . You are sleeping."

The patient proved a most susceptible subject. She obviously plunged into deep hypnotic slumber. In a few moments, in response to the physician's request that she reënact the incidents of the fatal accident she gave one of the most dramatic and thrilling presentations of a tragedy that I have ever witnessed. I refer, of course, to stage presentations for comparison. The young woman was acting a part, but she was acting under inspiration of the subconscious mind. She was going through the scenes of the fatal night, with the fervor of original enactment.

It suffices here to tell only of the critical scene, in which the wide-eyed dreamer seized a fragment of cardboard fashioned like an automobile wrench, which Dr. Goodrich had tossed on the floor; and, springing forward, beat it fiercely against the end of a rolled-up rug in the corner of the room, which the physician had pointed out to her as the unconscious form of her husband.

Three times in rapid succession, the mock-wrench fell on the supposed head of the victim. Then the dreamer drew back, with a stifled scream. Her eyes stared wildly at the form she saw there in the corner. She hurled the weapon from her hand, as she cried out: "So you meant to kill us! That was like you. It was not the first time, but it will be the last."

The next instant, the tense figure relaxed, and the sleeper slowly collapsed, until she lay full-length on the floor beside the carpet roll that to her sleep-self had represented the body of her husband.

Dr. Goodrich regarded the recumbent sleeper with grave, benignant, tolerant eyes. He stooped presently and lifted the figure as if it were that of a child.

A moment later the young woman was sitting erect in the chair where she had sat at the beginning of the experiment. She was still as far as ever removed from waking consciousness.

"Listen to me intently," the physician commanded in a low, earnest voice. "Very soon now you will come out of this sleep, and you will remember nothing that has happened here today. Nor will you ever remember anything of the incidents of the night when your husband lost his life in that terrible accident. You will recall only that you saw the other car collide with the one in which you were. The next thing you knew, you were lying in the bed, there in the hospital. You are never to attempt to recall what may have happened during the period when you lay unconscious, under shock of the accident. Nor are you to be distressed in any way about anything that happened that night, beyond the natural grief resulting from the loss of your husband, which time will alleviate. And now—awake!"

THE young woman roused, as from a deep sleep. But she apparently had no consciousness of the lapse of time. As she came to her senses, Dr. Goodrich was saying:

"Very well, Mrs. Bettersee, I think there is nothing more that I wish to ask you at present. I feel that we have all the information about the sad affair that can ever be had. It was one of those deplorable accidents that can neither be averted nor accounted for, except on the ground of the inevitable element of human carelessness. But it belongs to the past, and it is the part of wisdom to live in the present and the future. My suggestion would be that you take a trip abroad, and divert your mind as much as may be from recollections of the accident that bereaved you."

As the young woman left the office, she was walking with head erect, drawing deep breaths, as if freed from a colossal burden. Dr. Goodrich turned to me, his face still grave.

"No man can say what would constitute sheer justice in such a case as that," he mused. "Or at least I do not pretend to be able to say. But it seems clear that Bettersee met his death while attempting to wreck that lighter car with his heavy one. He may or may not have been dead before he received the blows on the head. But in any case he got no worse than he deserved. And so far as official action from this quarter is concerned, the case is forever closed."

"And an excellent evening's work done, in my opinion," I commented in all sincerity.

Major *of* Lamontai

Can a Man Be as Loyal to His Dog as His Dog Is to Him? A Story of Game Wardens and Fishermen

By Charles Alexander

FROM a faint trail in a salmonberry thicket a dog burst forth, tawny, shaggy and unkempt, like a hobo who has been drawn by his heels through a muddy culvert. His bounds and his poise when he stopped to look back belied the hobo. His heavy muscles were springy, as if each were on tiptoe. His brown eyes, half hidden by hair, were quick and challenging.

The broad pale-green salmonberry leaves rippled again, and old Wally emerged. He shook the twigs and leaves from his flannel blouse shirt, faded overalls and very slouch hat. He polished a sleeve across a shiny game warden's badge on his breast. The dog waited till Wally came up to him. He fell in step then, not behind the man but beside him, walking slowly, head up, with a certain dignity.

Wally, an old ten-pound single-shot rifle in the crook of his arm, straightened his six-foot thin form and also walked with a certain dignity. The evening sun glinted on his badge. They were but a hundred paces from a little board store and post office. Scattered on the worn board platform before the store were lounging men. Among them a brilliant red hat advertised itself with sharp bobs and ducks as its owner recited mighty stories.

Crossing a foreground of cart-tracks and yellow mesquite grass, Wally stalked straightly and seriously. His small blue eyes, wide apart in his long sharp face, shot glances at the city fisherman inhabiting the red hat. In the Lamontai, or Mountain River country, Wally was game warden. And Mr. Dagget, with the red hat, creamy creel, eight-ounce pole and tapered line, was the only angler on the Lamontai.

"Absolutely, there's no other way to take trout," Dagget was telling the native hill-billies and fern-jumpers lounging on the platform. "That is, no decent way. A trout's a gentleman. Between gentlemen everything ought to be fair an' square. Between a trout an' me, boys, there's fair play an' no gang-hooks."

Mr. Dagget removed the red hat that theoretically prevented people from shooting him for a deer or a mule, and rubbed his short black hair. Old Wally and his dog lingered, listening, in front of Dagget. Dagget's ferret eyes rested expertly on Wally's badge.

"Catch any deerslayers today, Leather-stocking?" inquired Dagget, his voice so serious that it hurt.

"Yeh," Wally replied, "the Major an' me did. We tooken an' treed a eight-foot panther. Gov'ment says a panther kills fifty deer a year. This ol' Tom, he won't kill no more does. Deer belongs to the United States. Me an' the Major keeps busy lookin' arter 'em. . . . Ketched a crowd of trout, now did ye? They ain't bitin'. They's too many *kultus* salmon crowdin' the river."

Dagget laughed. "Dad," he said impressively, "it was only the limit stopped me. Play fair and use your head and you'll get 'em. Can't strong-arm trout. It's like poker."

Wally's gimlet eyes bored into Dagget's. Major, the dog, watched Dagget's face.

"Mister," said Wally, "not today you didn't catch no limit unless ye tocken an' strong-armed 'em. With a spinner ye might catch *tzum* salmon, not trout. Nary a trout out from under the rocks when the *tyee* fish is runnin'. They's only one way ye could get 'em to come out from under the rocks."

"Rot!" Dagget snorted. "I got 'em. The boys saw my creel—full. I don't jerk 'em out with a telephone pole, either, old-timer. I *fish!* It's a science."

WITHOUT a word Wally strode around the store and down a trail to a chinquapin tree. Behind it was a cool spring, and on a shelf in the spring, fern-wrapped, were Dagget's trout.

Dagget followed the old man, and Major was between, watching Dagget over his shoulder. Wally's steps were too long. Dagget's were short. He did not reach the spring before Wally had sliced a trout open with his knife. Half a dozen red, berry-like salmon eggs, the size of peas, spilled out on the ground.

"That's how ye strong-armed 'em, gol hing ye!" the old man snarled. "Salmon eggs fer bait! No trout can keep from them eggs. I knowed it. Dagget, you know the Gov'ment law about salmon eggs." Drawing himself up, his blue eyes blazing, Wally said, "Dagget, consider yourself—"

He looked into a cold little .25 Colt, its tiny barrel thrusting beyond Dagget's white knuckles. Wally's hands did not go up. They seized Major by the shoulders and held the dog back.

"You old fool!" the salesman said. "I know the law. But it's a dead letter. You know that. Who ever heard of a man pinched for using salmon eggs? Everybody uses 'em. Now, listen to me: I know Colonel Barnes. He's state game warden an' my friend. I see him at the club every day. Play poker with him. *You* know where you'll get off damn' quick when I tell him of this."

Dagget put his gun up. Wally drew a sleeve across his sun-reddened brow. It was true. Salmon eggs, irresistible, were a despicable snare to use against hungry trout. Sportsmen did not stoop to them. The law forbade them. Yet some anglers baited their fly-hooks with salmon eggs.

Law and duty were the fetishes, the religion, of Wally's lonely years. Now and then his superiors, like Colonel Barnes, surprised him in the way they worshiped at the same shrine. In court he could do nothing with Dagget. Wally walked slowly back to the store. Major lay down outside it and bit the drying mud from between his toes.

Conjuring up a grin, Wally leaned against the lock boxes in the post-office part of the store and addressed Mrs. Purdom, who stood within the general delivery window. "Any Gov'ment business today?" he asked hopefully.

"No, Mr. Waller," she answered. "But there's a stack o' mail. I declare a body'd think you was aimin' to set up housekeepin', the catalogues you get."

She gave him an armful of vari-colored advertisements. Two years before Wally had sent his name to New York in answer to an advertisement that read: "Big mail every day. Send name, address and silver dime." The advertisement had not lied.

THE sallow widow, sharp and thin as a steel table-knife, considered Wally with possessive eyes. "Of course, Mr. Waller," she said, busying herself with a handful of letters, "you'll be wantin' me to bank that twenty dollars bounty you'll get for this last panther? I'm sendin' some money of my own to the bank next week. I thought—"

Juggling his own armful of mail, Wally reddened. "Ye see, Mis' Purdom, I aimed to send fer a brass-studded collar fer the Major. Facin' them panthers the way he does, he needs it to keep 'em from gettin' his throat. Just today—say! It was great the way he duv in on that old Tom. Gol hing! Wisht you'd been there," he added incautiously.

"Wisht I had, indeed!" the widow Purdom retorted. She was vexed to be outrivaled by a shaggy, dirty dog. Wrinkles flocked across her bony forehead. "Thomas Waller, you an' your hound dog! I should think you'd be ashamed not to have human company around you at all. Livin' up there with that whelp! That's no way for a gentleman to live, Thomas Waller!"

Thomas Waller hitched his stained overalls and moved toward the door. "He ain't no hound, Mis' Purdom," he said instructively. "He's a Airedale. An' ye know I tooken an' traded ten valuable panther hides fer him."

"More's the pity!" she muttered, shuffling her letters.

OUTSIDE, Wally walked with giant strides among the bantering fern-jumpers and up the trail through the salmonberries. At the store a fern-jumper observed: "That's a smart dog Wally's got."

Dagget squinted doubtfully. "Smart as Wally, anyway," he replied. "The only difference between 'em, in fact, is that the dog can't vote."

A laugh went up. But Wally, on the trail, did not hear it. He thought almost wistfully of the widow Purdom. She really must have meant that she would marry him. In his face he felt the hot blood burning. But he couldn't support her, and he wouldn't live out of her store, with the tobacco-chewing fern-jumpers perched out front every day. Rivers and forests were better friends. He could afford them.

For a mile Wally's trail climbed among cascaras and vine-maples and alders. Then it pitched upward among rocks. Wally came out on a verge high above the river.

From far ahead Major returned at a lope and sat, panting and looking down. Wally watched the river. Here he always paused to watch it. Below him, through two walls of dark forest, it fretted over black and white rocks. It was a nervous river. In spots it ran smoothly for twenty feet over white rock, the water like bottle-green glass, to sweep and lash upon a protruding black boulder. Stealthily it swept into dark corners to rip and fling itself against rocks. Patches of lather, evidences of fury, tossed on it.

Wally regarded it. It was part of his domain. Up that wild path between the walls of the forest the salmon came, those that had swum out of it four years before and ranged the free seas in swift-gleaming freedom. To it they returned, great and gleaming, and up its rapids they fought, to spawn, which was a crowning glory, and high on its upper reaches to die, which was the wages of their freedom. All this to old Wally was big, like the phenomenon of the stars, of a forest wind, or of a budding woman.

Major left the man, trotting back down the trail. He returned with news. This he imparted by putting his paws on the man's breast and holding his eyes for a moment. Then he dropped, turned, and looked back down the trail, ears pointed.

But Wally went on. He climbed for a quarter of a mile. Close by, all the way, was a heavy roar, where the Lamontai plunged over the mountain and raved down a precipitate series of rapids and chutes, among massive boulders.

At these falls the trail came to the river again. Here, at the head of the steep rapids, the river leaped over the broken shoulder of the mountain in a forty-foot fall. It was thin, this flow of green water, and it splattered on a hard boulder below that had been worn down until its surface was a bed of needles, the softer stone carried away.

At other points, beside the fall, were minor ladder-like rapids. Up these the greater and stronger salmon flashed. Wally watched. He saw a back cut the water, a flash in a smother of white foam. He never understood how the salmon fought up through such water, up and up, beyond boulder and boulder, until the break of the mountain and the swift deep pool beyond were reached.

Wally had felled a tree across this pool. It served for a foot-log by which he reached his cabin on the mountain beyond. He talked to Major, and walked on the log. Deep below him the wrinkled ribbon of the river, dappled green and white, reached away to the sea. The sun was dipping toward the Pacific. From out there the salmon came.

"How'd you like salmon steak for supper, Major?" he asked. "Or baked? I'll get some clay from the cliff an' we'll bake it. Say, man, I'd like to bring down my brass spoon an' slap it on them riffles. But it's your turn. Mind ye don't chase 'em down to the pool. Ye only go over them falls onct. Stay in the riffles. Get a big chinook that could bite your leg off."

EAGERLY barking, Major loped up the river. Above the pool were mild, shallow and wide riffles, where shale clogged the stream. After resting in the pool, the salmon worked through the shallows and on, deep into the dark ranges.

Major leaped in. Wally sat on the log and watched. Wading and swimming, the dog made the center of the river. He worked always upstream, as did the salmon. His tawny head, the water swirling about his nose, turned from side to side, watching. Then sidewise he lunged.

He missed. A spectator came out on the bank beside him. It was Dagget, with a heavy pole and a big spoon, looking for salmon. He had wicked three-gang hooks behind his spoon. Major stood on his head in a foaming riffle. He went under. In the white water there was a storm of tawny dog, flashing salmon, angry water. And they went upstream, dog and fish, floundering and fighting, breaking water and disappearing under it, Major's feet now in the air, now his head.

And he came to shore and dragged the big fish out. He dropped it to bark to Wally, seized it as it flounced and slapped him with its tail. He shook it savagely until it lay still, but for a long time it would not stay still. And he never bit deep into it, for once he had been salmoned, and with Wally's help had lived through; and he knew fishbones as well as fish.

As soon as his salmon showed signs of behaving, the dog plunged into the river again. Wally had not seen Dagget. Now he heard him.

"Look here, Dad," Dagget called. "Get your dog out, will you? How can I fish with him chasing around in there?"

Wally had wanted only one salmon. Now he wanted two. "Got as much right to the river as you have," he bawled. "Go get 'em, Maj."

Dagget waded in. From his creel he took a *tzum* salmon—a small steelhead—and deliberately baited his barbed gang-hooks with it. Then he cast the steelhead beyond the dog. Slowly he dragged the floundering fish across the current in front of Major. He fished for the dog.

Major dived for it. Wally's yell split the air. The old man came running from log to bank, bank to Dagget. Dagget was soft-faced from much shaving-cream, and pink under his small straight nose. Tiny veins showed on his chin. His hands, monkey-like, were small and black-haired. Wally yelled the dog out of the water. His long arm unwound. Dagget hurtled and fell.

His lips bleeding, a tooth slanted out of position, he groped in his khaki pocket as he got up. Wally was on him, yelling and smashing with his thin hard knuckles.

"You hellish rat!" he screamed. "Ye'll catch my dog on a hook! Ye'll let him swaller it an' then tear his insides out!"

Dagget was down again. Wally seized the dog, who had scrambled out and charged.

"Pull that gun!" croaked Wally. "Pull it, ye skunk. Ye can hook me, Mister, but ye can't hook my dog. Pull your gun. Ye can't shoot us both fast enough!"

Making wordless, choking sounds, the dapper salesman got up. This time the automatic was in his hand. Wally released the dog. He stepped close to the gun and crashed his fists into Dagget's face. The salesman went down again. On the rocks the gun clattered and exploded. Wally pulled Major from the man's throat. Muttering, picking up the salmon as he passed, he stalked across the log and climbed the mountain to his cabin.

AFTER a baked-salmon dinner, old Wally that night sat before the red coals in his smoke-stained cabin. Major lay beside him. Wally, in his homemade easy chair, lifted his feet to the wood-box and unlaced his spiked muleskin shoes.

In the argument with Dagget Wally had received a three-cornered tear in one knee of his overalls. His skinny leg showed in the flickering light from the fire. "Gol hing, Major!" Wally complained. "Hate to be always patchin'. Wisht the widow'd patch for us, Major."

Long he stared into the embers. He was uneasy. He arose and swabbed out his rifle with a ramrod. Except that he was clean-shaved, he resembled a cartoon of Uncle Sam. Now and again he looked to the queer five-paned window. Beyond it all was black. He frowned, and sometimes addressed his thoughts to Major.

The dog's head rested on one foreleg. When Wally talked, Major lifted his head, regarding his master's eyes. When Wally was silent, Major laid his head down and dozed.

"Somethin' worries us, man," Wally said, lost in a dark study. He searched back over the day's events. "Maybe it's Mis' Purdom. But we can't live down there on what we're makin'. . . . Major, that Tom panther this mornin', now, he might have had your throat, Major. Good old man! But I got to git ye that studded collar. I'll git ye a warden's badge an' fix it on the collar. The old Toms'll know ye represent the Gov'ment then."

HE CHOSE a catalogue and looked at the dog collars again, while his thoughts idled back over the morning's hunt. Major, trailing and treeing a cougar, had brought Wally to the tree with his deep-lunged music. Wally's shot had just missed the heart, puncturing the cat's lung. Before Wally could reload the cougar landed on the ground, and in an instant a swirl and hubbub replaced dog and cougar. Shaking free, the cougar had taken form again, whirled and launched in a sidelong leap at Wally himself. With a puny knife-blow Wally met the leap. Then it was that Major with a rush struck the cat's head, hurling him away. In his chair before the fire, Wally drew a deep and loud breath.

"Good man!" he said. Major arose and laid his head on the old man's bony knee. "You come close to gittin' minced. But I can't lose ye. You know I tooken an' hunted fer two years to get the skins to buy ye. Best dog God ever made. A Gov'ment dog ye is, man, an' named fer a young officer I fought Indians with."

The old man growled and cursed, "Gol hing! Gol hing!" remembering Dagget and the gang-hooks. At ten o'clock Major stretched like a sagging rope and walked to the door. A long, low talk he made in his throat, ending with a short bark.

Wally arose stiffly. "Bedtime, sure," he yawned. Opening the door, he followed Major out. "I tell ye, man, trouble's ahead. Somethin's goin' to happen. I feel it. Don't run far tonight, will ye?"

Tall gray trees, with mountainous bark, stood around in the darkness. Far overhead branches sprang from the straight trunks, roofing out the sky. Some moonlight filtered in. Major picked out a fir tree, eight feet through at the base, and turned around and around in the soft needles at its base before lying down. Wally came and put an arm on the tree, as he might place it around a man's shoulder. He leaned his old face against the tree. He had never yet pressed his face against a woman's.

Back in the cabin, he lifted a steel-white dipper from the water bucket and drank in gulps. Filtered moonlight gleamed on the dipper. The high forest, open underneath like a pillared temple, swayed above and crooned, a rising, pulsing sob, a chord ancient and moving as no organ's chords are moving.

"Good night," said Wally. "We can't live with the widow, wrappin' up beans an' always listenin' to them fern-jumpers chaw tobacco. Now if we had a income so's we could hold up our heads among 'em—"

He stripped and got into a white mail-order nightshirt, hanging his blouse shirt where the badge would gleam in the dim light. Then by the dying fire he crouched and painfully read from Proverbs in a heavy Bible. When he put the Bible on a shelf he still lingered, uneasy. He scolded himself. "Gol hing! Old fool!" To rouse his spirits he danced and kicked a few steps, and quavered weirdly in a high sheer voice a hymn in the old Northwest jargon:

Mikah minchelute ensikah,
Ankute yukumalah;
Konawa edinch aguitquah
Quonesim ponanakow.

Still he frowned, and glared from under his brows. The hair around his ears was white and bristly. He muttered, "*Sahhalee Tyee!* Chief above!" and climbed into his bunk.

When next he went to the post office the trouble broke.

THAT was five days later, and he had the scalps of seven great timber-wolves to send to Portland for bounties. In Portland, meanwhile, Dagget had got in his work. Over a poker game one murky night Dagget chatted with Colonel Barnes, state game warden. Yes, there was good fishing in the Lamontai country, and few fishermen. The chinooks were running. Steelheads also were still coming home from the sea.

"The river's full of 'em," Dagget said, lighting a cigarette. "But there's no chance, no chance."

"That so?" Colonel Barnes inquired. "Why?"

"Check!" said Dagget to the players. "Why, there's a wild dog on the riffles all day, jerking 'em out. No chance to fish. If he pulls out one he pulls forty a day. Crazy-mad about salmon. You know how they get."

"Raise you five dollars," the fat colonel said to the baize table; and to Dagget: "I know. We have more or less trouble with dogs on all the coast creeks. I have a warden shoot them. We have a warden of sorts at Lamontai. Old native. . . . Two pairs, my pot, boys! . . . He's not on regular salary. I doubt if he draws two hundred a year. . . . Cards, two! . . . I'll have him shoot this dog. . . . Who dealt me this alleged hand?"

He looked at it, but saw instead certain visions of white water and glistening fish. Dagget saw old Wally shooting the dog he had beaten Dagget over. . . .

OLD Wally asked the widow Purdom diffidently, "Any Gov'ment business, Mis' Purdom?"

"Yes, and a stack of fourth-class mail for you. I declare, Mr. Waller, you must be a busy man, the way you stay away from civilization."

"Busy, yes, ma'am. I've fetched seven wolf pelts. I'll have ye send fer that brass collar, if ye please. . . . Quick-stamp, eh?"

He took the small white envelope with the blue corner-head of the State Game Commission and a special-delivery stamp on it, muttering, "Gov'ment business." Opening the letter, he looked blandly over the words. It would take him an hour to puzzle out the typing. Staring at the letter, he looked intelligent, handed it to the postmistress and cried:

"Well, Gol hing! What would ye think o' that, now, Mis' Purdom?" He looked innocently into her eyes. "Just read it out, will ye?"

She understood her man. She meant to have him for her own. At a glance she read the letter. A horror filled her eyes. Wally saw it. He stiffened.

"Come right back here in my room, Mr. Waller," she said. Two lounging fern-jumpers were in the store. She glanced at them. "I want to speak to you—on business."

Back in her tidy room, flushing as he saw her white bed, Wally listened to fate as Mrs. Purdom read the letter aloud:

Mr. Thomas Waller,
Lamontai, Oregon.

My dear Warden: This office has had a number of complaints of the activities of a wild dog on your river detrimental to the pleasure of fishermen. The dog must be removed.

If it has an owner, kindly instruct him to shoot it, and if it has no owner, or he declines to kill the dog, do so yourself. You will make it clear to the owner that the law cannot recognize the right of a dog to fish, cannot license him to fish or allow him the privilege in any way.

I hope to see you soon.

Very truly yours,
A. A. Barnes,
State Game Warden.

In Mrs. Purdom's sharp eyes was a quick gleam of sympathy. She saw how Wally stood, stiffly, his world whirling, his eyes cringing under the blow.

"I declare!" she cried. "If that ain't just too bad! Thomas Waller, you come right down here to supper with me tonight. We all need human company in these afflictions. An' goodness knows you've never had enough!"

But Wally, the open letter now in his hand, walked out blindly among the loiterers and, unseeing, stalked through the mesquite, into the salmonberries. Major came, not now at his side but at his heels, head down. And Wally climbed by the nervous river, crossed the log, stumbled slowly to his cabin.

While the afternoon wore away, the fir trees grieving above, he sat humped over his board table. Sometimes he muttered: "By Goddlemighty, I won't do it! I won't fer no Gov'ment." Major walked about, his ears laid back, or stood against Wally's leg restlessly.

And in his mind, while night fell, Wally recounted his life, all his relations with his Government. It had always been a *hyas kloshe* Government, a very dear, a very high father. First, as a lanky lad, Wally had been taken from the Indians who had raised him and alone knew the fate of his parents. He had been taken by a band of bearded men in blue, bugles ringing, Custer in his campaign hat and saber at their head. And, himself wearing that blue, Wally had struggled through the snowy passes to the Nez Percé wars on the John Day River; with General Fremont on the desert he had corralled the tribes within the cone of Fort Rock; with young Grant at Grant's Pass and on the River Rogue he had seen the Rogue war; with young Phil Sheridan he had helped clean up the Yaquina and the Siletz. For these things he had been repaid in Indian war medals.

"By Goddlemighty, I won't do it!" he cried, the cry tearing his breast. It had been father, mother and confessor to him, his Government. Now it ordered him to shoot his dog.

He got up, swaying. Automatically and because he must do something, he opened the block of his rifle and pushed a cartridge home. The hammer he set at half-cock. "I won't do it," he mumbled, gripping the rifle. Down the mountain trail he stumbled, muttering, "I won't." The forest crooned, sweet sounds floated from the river, a hoot owl made the echoing evening melodious. Wally paused in the forest above the pool, hesitating to face the dying sunlight. "I won't do it," he snarled, and leaning on a tree he waited for darkness, when dark deeds may be done. He slid to the ground; Major came, and Wally took the dog in his arms. In a rosy-red kiss Major's tongue flashed out.

"Stop!" begged Wally, pushing the dog away.

Puzzled, Major stood off and watched his bowed master, undecided as to what he might do that would please him. And then he wheeled and ran to the river and to the foot-log. He would fetch an offering of salmon to his master.

For Wally the roar of the river drowned out what happened.

COLONEL BARNES, portly and expressionless as a Buddha, followed his letter to Lamontai. He drove his car from Waldport down the beach on what he represented to himself was a trip of inspection. But he had old clothes, boots and salmon gear in the car. He recalled that the Lamontai, according to Dagget, was swarming with salmon. The fishing dog, the one nuisance on the river, ought to be gone today.

Parking in the mesquite-grass, he waded through the tobacco chewers and entered the cool of Mrs. Purdom's store. He asked where Warden Waller was. For, as State Game Warden, the colonel had come to confer with his deputy. He hoped Waller was far away, so that he might be forced, while waiting, to kill time by fishing for salmon at the first riffles.

"Why—Thomas Waller's in the mountains—a long ways off, I declare I believe," Mrs. Purdom said, thinking fast. She must not tell Barnes or any one else what Thomas Waller was doing. She added, her black eyes falling, "He's on some—some Government business today." She thought that Wally would go far away to do what he had to do.

"Of course," Barnes said, greatly relieved. "He'll be in tonight, won't he?"

"I don't know, I declare. Mr. Waller doesn't always come in to town." (She thought Wally would not come to her for a day or two after doing what he had to do.) "You see, he lives in a cabin on the mountain with only a—with a—well, alone." She gathered some spirit into her voice. "I don't think it's right for a man to live that way. I tell him, my gracious, he should live here! You understand, in civilization."

"Of course, of course," rumbled Barnes, secretly amused, as he sensed the situation. "It's getting evening, Mrs. Purdom. I think I'll just drift up the river and try for a salmon before dark, while I'm waiting for Waller."

In the curtained tonneau of his car he struggled into old clothes and boots, armed himself with his tackle and emerged, to disappear up the salmonberry trail. And he sat on the foot-log, humming an answer to the wild song of the river, threading up his pole, as Major trotted out on the log.

Major stopped. Warden and dog looked steadily at each other, their eyes meeting and holding.

"Hello, old man," Barnes said casually. He had an Airedale of his own.

MAJOR acknowledged the tone by lowering his head and sniffing casually of the stranger. He looked upstream, his eyes seeming to focus on illimitable distance. Back over his shoulder he looked, at the forested mountain-side where Wally sat limply at the foot of a tree. Then Major managed a turn on the foot-log and walked back to the bank whence he had come, stepping slowly, listening without appearing to listen for what the stranger might do behind him.

Barnes did nothing but feel contented and busy himself again with his salmon pole. From a fat fly-book he extracted a huge brass spoon, gang-hooks and double-strength leaders. Once he looked over his shoulder at the falls behind him, mesmerized by the hurtling water. Manlike, he thought it would be ruinous to float over the falls. When he looked back, Major was wading into the riffles at the upstream end of the pool.

Barnes watched. Major fished. Barnes lighted his pipe; it went out; he forgot it. He laid his pole along the foot-log and his undivided feelings and faculties followed the fishing dog.

Major was a tawny sea-wolf. He trailed a salmon that crawled as only chinooks crawl through the ripped waters of the little cascades. Major swam, his jaw cleaving the water like an otter's; he lifted his head to spot and follow his fish; he whirled, dived, swam again.

In a lather-coated whirlpool below a boulder he plunged under. Barnes saw Major's back uppermost, then his legs, and the glistening body of a salmon striking great blows as it flopped in Major's jaws. He had it near the tail. Its struggles blinded and half drowned him.

Slowly he worked it toward the near shore, opposite where he had entered the river. The salmon was longer than Major, and heavy and strong from its years in rigorous seas. Coughing and panting, Major lay among the rocks with his paws on his catch. Once it went flouncing away. He leaped on it.

And on the foot-log Barnes had forgotten his habitual passivity. Darkness gathered. He could not now fish. But he called to the dog and cheered. The fight had been great. His voice was rich with praise.

Major understood that voice, and answered with stubby wags of his tail. But he did not forget Wally. Picking up his fish, he came out on the log.

Barnes stood to let the dog pass. "Old man, you're all right," he crooned. "You're the goods. Go on; you can pass. I'd like to take you home with me."

There was no extra room on the log. As Major sidled in front of Barnes, the salmon flopped violently in its dying throes.

Major clung to it. Barnes moved an inch backward. His heavy pole on the log was between his feet. He tripped. And dog and man, abruptly, were in the water, and a dozen yards below the log, and a dozen yards above the falls. Barnes was being dragged to the falls.

With his teeth he seized Major's shaggy flank beside him. He fought desperately with hands and feet. The dog was a steady, powerful tug. Inch by inch they edged toward shore. Or they dragged back, as new currents caught the man. Once Major lifted his head and gave an explosive cry, the cry that often had brought old Wally miles over the mountains to a treed cougar.

Wally came, as the echoing call reached him faintly. He stood on the foot-log, the swift moony pool about him, the bellowing falls and the man and dog below him. The salmon pole was still balanced on the log.

With it Wally reached the man and, the pole bending, urged him to shore. Major was free. In the darkness he swam above Barnes. He dropped behind. The water from Barnes's kicking boots strangled him. He was done in. As Barnes dragged out on the rocks a hoarse cry from Wally's quiet old throat struck through him. He rolled, and looked.

Touched by moonlight, Major swept slowly, tail-first, in the smooth racing water above the brink. As he tipped over the falls he was raised for an instant, still swimming upstream, his homely dripping face high, his eyes on old Wally on the log.

A LONG time Barnes lay among the rocks, panting. And Wally, silent, his face on his arm, lay full-length on the log. He whispered to himself: "One thing, Maj, boy: I'd 'a' never tooken an' done it. Ye know I wouldn't. The Gov'ment jist didn't understand, Maj. An' now—" He spoke aloud, bitterly. "Now I'll never *say* I done it, neither, Maj. I'll say I ain't an' won't!"

"What?" Barnes shouted weakly.

Wally came slowly and helped the Government in the fat person of Barnes down the river to Mrs. Purdom's. Leaving him beside the kitchen range, where the widow excitedly made beef tea, Wally sought the front porch.

Barnes told the widow how it happened. And she told him. She told him it was Wally's dog. Almost she told him it was the dog he had ordered shot. In a flash of intelligence Barnes understood. He set down his brown bowl of beef tea and stood up. The widow's black eyes were soft as she dabbed at them with a corner of her apron. She put in a broken word for Wally:

"Please, sir, Mr. Waller was powerful set on that dog, I declare."

But Barnes was out of the room. He saw Wally, slumped against a post on the porch. Wally stirred, held out his hand.

On it was his warden's badge. And it was *Sah-halee Tyee*, the Government, a thing of the round world and arching skies, greater than man, and it had always been his saving faith; but it was not greater than Wally's and Major's love. . . .

"I didn't do—it, Mr. Barnes," Wally grunted. "Didn't an' wouldn't. Not even —fer the Gov'ment." It was heresy. But he said it.

BARNES took the badge from his wavering hand. He did not clap Wally roundly on the back. Softly he dropped his arm about the old man's shoulders. "Why, that rotter Dagget!" he cried. "The skunk! I'll beat him to shreds, don't you fear, Waller. He told me, you know— I suppose he'll never come back here. But I'll smear his lying mouth, never worry." He had a brilliant inspiration. "Now you come in with me, old man. I've something to say I want Mrs. Purdom to hear. . . .

"It's this way," Barnes said over the beef tea. "We've—the Government needs a full-time warden here. Full pay, you know —eighteen hundred. I think you'd have to live down here, where you'd be in touch with hunters coming and going."

Barnes glanced into Mrs. Purdom's eyes. He felt he was entitled to that reward. "Now I've just time to change clothes and hit for the Waldport Hotel. Tide's right for beach driving."

He arose. "By the way, I'll send you an Airedale—special pet of mine. He needs the mountain life. City's no place for he-dogs. I'll drop in occasionally and see him. And I wish you'd teach him to fish."

Wally climbed to his feet. Barnes stepped close, pinned the shining Government badge on Wally's shirt. Then Barnes was gone. The widow Purdom bustled to her stove, where more beef tea simmered, surreptitiously turned the kerosene light lower. Her old heart was racing. Her long fingers were work-hardened, but their touch, on Wally's arm, was soft and light.

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Again Tommy Casts Away Happiness

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When a Man's Strongest Guiding Principle is Simply the Determination Not to Hurt Other People's Feelings, What a Mess He Is Bound to Make of Life!

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Illustrations by John R. Neill

Begin this serial with any instalment. The story up to this point is here.

TOMMY DUMBARTON gave no great amount of thought to Diane Shirley that afternoon. They had played at love—his conscience was clear about that. It had been a game; no more. And one in which the opening gambit had not been his. Now the game was over, and he had told her so the night before, in the garden of his father's New Canaan house.

He was sorry the game had ever been started. So much he could admit to himself. But he couldn't blame himself very deeply. He had had no mooring, after all, when it had begun—weeks, months before, in another garden—that of Shirley's Rhinebeck home. Maizie had gone out of his life. There had been the idyl between them, in Cannes, after the war. And, because he had not been sure, because he had been afraid of love, she had cast him off—oh, rightly enough!

He had come home—to take up, after four years of war, the career as a sculptor that he had begun. Then Diane, daughter of the man who had given him his first commission, had intruded herself into his life, and there had followed—well, what had not been, had never promised to be, an idyl.

Then, while Diane was abroad, he had met Maizie again. And he knew now, beyond all doubt, that he loved her. She had repulsed him. But slowly, with infinite difficulty, he had worn down her resistance. The memory of her kiss was fresh with him still; that shyly given, reluctant kiss that had sealed their new and truer understanding, one of the other. Diane? Oh, well, Diane must come to understand, that was all. No longer was it the past that held him, interested him. He looked to the future, and to Maizie.

But Diane, riding off in a pique with Stork, Tommy's nearest friend, was far from understanding. Tommy was being moody; perhaps, if he saw her go off with the Stork, he'd come to his senses. She had led Stork on, his sheer brutality of response and his savage love-making had angered her. When he had freed her she had turned on him like a fury with her threat to tell Tommy.

A full grin appeared on the Stork's face, and he lighted a cigarette.

"Since when has he been your protector?" he inquired.

She stood up suddenly. "I'll tell him," she said.

"Why waste your time on him?" inquired the painter significantly.

"What do you mean?"

"He's taken already."

"I don't believe it," she said. But a curious little arrow came in her heart.

"Wait and see," retorted Stork. "Why else is he so anxious to get back to town tomorrow?"

"His fountain," she said coldly. "He's conscience-stricken because he couldn't get it out to Rhinebeck. He isn't like you!"

Stork allowed himself a full laugh. "Why, my dear child!" he said. "You ought to go back to boarding-school. Tommy's conscience is simply another woman!"

"Not Tommy's!"

"Even Tommy's," answered the Stork.

THERE is a peculiar quality of poignancy to any emotion felt for the first time—a poignancy that seldom returns in its original vividness. To Diane real jealousy had probably never come before. But there was little question about its exceptional quality as she and Stork rode down the cedar-studded hills, when the rain had ceased, an hour later.

In the light of the painter's unexpected revelations there was left no irritation against him. There remained only a remembrance of a dramatic moment, a dim conviction that she had met a man of her own kind—and that was all. What more consideration could she give it when there stood out with startling distinctness this gleaming fact of another girl—and Tommy?

In the white glare of that even the past was illumined with a light that made plain many things only dimly visible before: the night when she had first met him at the New Canaan Country Club and he had made no advances; his uneven flirtation that week-end at Rhinebeck; his talk of conscience and morality during the sittings; his queer lapses and hesitations on the Astor Roof, in the Rialto, even on the divan in Aunt Jocelyn's library!

And he had met this Maizie on the Riviera, before their own intimacy had begun. He had been crazy about her there, Stork had said! Just somebody with whom to fill in—that was what she had been all along. His conscience, truly—as Stork had said—was merely this yellow-haired Maizie Delafield!

All that had occurred to her in one emotional flash while jealousy had stabbed her with a poignancy she had never known. And her feelings and intentions toward Tommy had intensified a thousand fold! Not into hate, and a desire for revenge—oh, no! Rather to hot hatred of this unknown Maizie; to a flaming intention to possess Tommy once and for all, completely!

It was her clear and fixed intention six hours later as she arranged her hair in the hall before the mirror, beside the square portrait of Plinty as a young lady, with her Titian hair and green eyes. There seemed, indeed, to be almost a reflection of that Titian red in her eyes, as she gave her hair a final pat and turned toward the drawing-room and bridge.

Tommy was standing by the table; but she ignored him obviously as she came in slowly, conscious of John Dumbarton's piercing eyes upon her. Tommy himself, indeed, was no longer of prime importance in the carrying out of this flaming intention which possessed her. These others were her pawns.

She went upstairs early. Up the stairs she hurried, down the long hall, past the picture of Oscar and into her room where the moonlight lay in squares on the plain rug. She closed the door, snapped on the dresser lamp and began tearing quickly, even nervously at the hooks and snaps of her evening dress, tearing at the eyelets that held up the skirt—more work for Marie—disengaging her feet from her mauve satin slippers. In a moment she had thrown her things in crumpled heaps on the old-fashioned Colonial bed and was seeking her flowered negligee in the closet by the rose-light of the bed lamp, her hair in a raven cloud about her white shoulders.

By the door then, minute after minute, she listened, her eyes trying to penetrate the darkness of Tommy's room through the half-opened door across the dimly lit hall, her attention riveted upon the noises which came from downstairs.

Laughter; confused remarks; the noise of glasses, silver on china, pushing of chairs. Her father and Mr. Dumbarton crossing into the drawing-room. Her mother, Mrs. Dumbarton, Stork, in the hall; Tommy, evidently, closing the piano. Then good nights and last jests.

A little shiver crept on her skin—a shiver more of excitement than of fear; and she closed the door except for a tiny crack through which a little line of dim light struck into the moonlit obscurity of her room.

Indecision was expressed in the light clasp of her hand upon the door knob, in her half-parted lips, in the fingers upon her breast.

Then came sudden relief at the unmistakable sounds of her father following her mother, ascending the stairs, going down the hall the other way to their room; Mrs. Dumbarton's voice receding into the sitting-room at the head of the stairs and then apparently into her bedroom beyond; Stork, closing his door loudly; Tommy's footsteps coming down the blue-carpeted hall to the room opposite; Mr. Dumbarton, calling the dog down by the big, white front door—

She wrapped her negligee closer about her, her heart beating audibly.

Sound of a door closing—yes, Tommy's!

ANOTHER minute she waited; then she opened her door and slipped into the hall, stood a second, drawing in her breath, and then turned the knob of Tommy's door and stepped inside, closing the door behind her, putting her back to it.

He was standing by his chiffonier, by the reading lamp; he turned abruptly and saw her.

"Why, Di!" he said. "What's the matter?"

He was astonished, for the instant, out of all remembrance of the anger which had so recently possessed him.

"Nothing," she said.

Her eyes had a preoccupied look, and yet a curious flash.

"You shouldn't come in here," he said.

He was still motionless, amazed, only half aware of the significance of her presence, still plunged in the mist which their quarrel had raised in his heart—a mist no amount of talk downstairs had been able as yet to dissipate. Completely unused to hard words, to quarrels, and to anger with women—totally unaccustomed to such things, he was. And doubt, regret and a certain shame over having spoken as he had to a woman still filled him. He had been rotten, of course, to lose his temper! There had been no need of that—no need of striking at her heart in such a manner! She had been disdainful downstairs by the bridge table, but her wounded feelings had been clearly evident just the same.

"I couldn't stand not seeing you again," she was saying in a tiny voice. "And you're going in the morning—and I just wanted to say that I'm—sorry."

"Why, I'm sorry, too," he said at once.

"You don't sound very sorry—"

"But I am!"

"I didn't mean all I said," she confessed.

"Why, neither did I," he agreed. A little perspiration broke out on his forehead. "But we can't discuss it here, you know, Di."

"I know," she said. "I just wanted to—to kiss—and forget!" She came forward abruptly. "I'm so sorry, Tommy," she whispered, her eyes upon the floor.

She flung her arms around him suddenly, blinding him with the strands of her dark, loose hair.

"As sorry as that!" she whispered.

She buried him in the yielding depths of her embrace.

"Tommy!" she whispered. "I love you!"

"Di—" he said. His hands were on her arms.

"Just let me stay a minute," she whispered.

"You'll have to go!" he said breathlessly.

There was no passion in him; only sudden dread, fear, product of the abrupt glimpse of what discovery could mean for them both.

"You can't stay!" he said.

But she leaned back from him, her eyes wide.

"Why?" she asked. "Aren't we all right again?"

"Of course," he replied. "But some one might come—"

But it was all he had time to say. For over Diane's shoulder he could see the door opening then—and he knew some one had already come.

"Good Lord!" he said under his breath. Perspiration flooded his forehead.

It was his father—and, behind him, Patterson Shirley's lounging bulk.

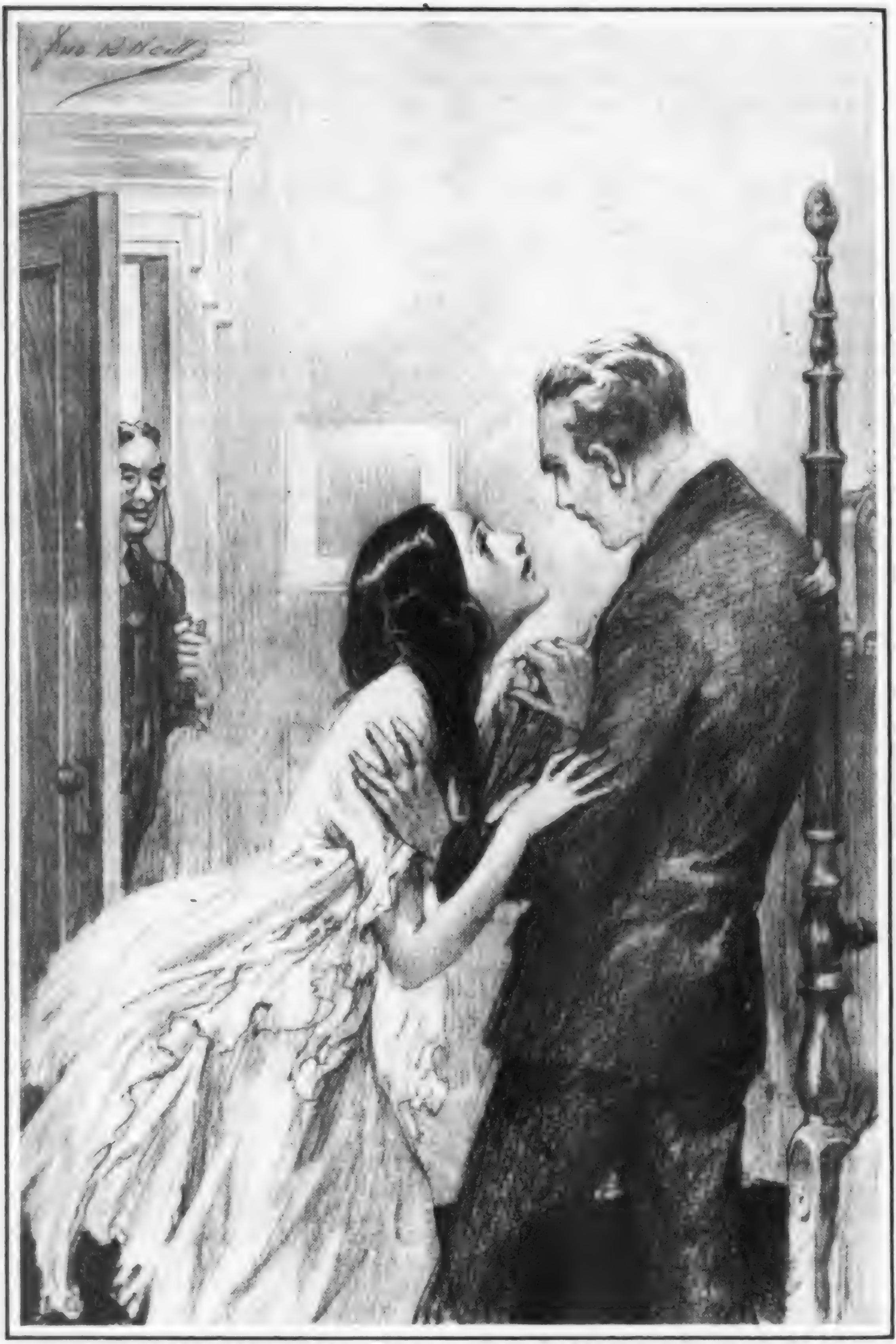
In the doorway they stood, indeed, the door open behind them letting in a sudden, soft breeze that stirred Diane's hair upon his cheek.

"I beg your pardon," said John Dumbarton slowly.

"Oh!" said Diane.

She spun around, clutching to her the flowered negligee that revealed so clearly the soft yielding lines of her figure.

"Well!" It was Patterson Shirley's voice.



Over Diane's shoulder he could see the door opening—and he knew some one had come. "Good Lord!" he said under his breath. Perspiration flooded his forehead.

"We had a quarrel," said Diane in a little whisper.

Her hands were trembling now. But she leaned upon Tommy, who did not raise his arms.

"Why, you young villains!" exclaimed Patterson Shirley. "A lovers' quarrel?"

"Yes," admitted Diane.

She returned John Dumbarton's piercing gaze until she could no longer sustain it.

"Didn't we, Tommy?" she added.

She buried her face upon his shoulder, while dryness came upon his lips, perspiration on his hands, and a curious unwavering look in his eyes that gave him of a sudden the first resemblance to his father he had ever had. There was only one thing for him to do, of course, and he knew it. And yet— Good God! And yet—

"Why, yes!" he said.

He disengaged her gently.

"By God!" said John Dumbarton.

And from the hall came voices. . . .

STORK said: "I'd leave the country."

But Tommy did not answer him. They were on the train bound for New York.

"In fact," the Stork continued, "I wouldn't take any chances—even though engagement doesn't mean you've got to marry a girl."

Again Tommy was silent.

In his mind, at the moment, there was a vivid memory of childhood: a memory of his father, in the white-paneled dining-room in New Canaan, shouting at him the day he gave away Plinty's rabbits, "For heaven's sake, get some iron!" It had been a demand filled with considerable mystery at the time, inasmuch as no iron had ever been brought. But it was considerably clearer now, on the train, amid the confusion of the conversations and card games, the morning papers and drifting smoke that accompanied the 8:02 to New York.

This was what his father had meant; this was the result of possessing no iron in one's character: one became a piece of putty!

That had forced itself upon him in the grim hours toward dawn as he had lain upon his bed in the house on Primrose Lane, reviewing the whole course of events which had culminated in such stunning disaster. He had had no fault to find with the motives which had brought Diane to his room at midnight. He had planted the seeds for those himself, he had admitted, and had watered them assiduously every moment he had spent with her since that first night in the garden in Rhinebeck.

Diane had not reflected, of course. It was a mad impulse upon her part. Her infatuation had flamed into love—and had blinded her, most likely, to everything else. That was all. She really loved him—and had no idea of the blow she had dealt him.

More than anything else, that fact had stunned him during all the ghastly congratulations: the plain delight of his mother: the back-bangings and badinage to which Patterson Shirley had treated him; the conventional kiss Mrs. Shirley had bestowed upon him; the laughter and chaffing and hullabaloo. Not until the whole midnight scene had ended, and he had sat alone on his bed in the moonlight, had consequences begun to take vivid form for him. And then the thought of Maizie overwhelmed his heart completely.

Maizie!

Only for a brief instant had he contemplated any escape from his situation; and then he had recognized its impossibility at once. It would not require a day, he had realized, for the conventionalized facts of last night's brief moment to travel outward on a thousand invisible wires from this old-fashioned house in New Canaan—to Rhinebeck, to New York, to Washington Square. Even if an effort were made to prevent it, if that hybrid of society, the "unannounced" engagement, were to result, as a consequence of his and Diane's insistence, the fact could not be kept from Maizie. Not by any twisting of honor's obligations, not by any perfection of sophistry could he contemplate that. He was faced with the prospect of telling her, in any event.

Hour after hour he had recognized the inevitability of that; too blinded by the prospect to devise any plan of action, unable to do anything but recognize the grim fact, as if it were some single flaming gateway which had suddenly opened on the wall of his horizon—a gateway toward which his steps must inevitably bring him, no matter what pathway he chose, no matter if death and destruction lurked upon its portals, no matter though no one could tell what lay beyond it.

It was a prospect, he had realized, that he could not reveal to Diane. Loyalty to Maizie forbade that. He could not put her heart into Diane's vanity case for her to stare at. An engagement, even though a temporary one, was inevitable now. That was enough. It was not necessary both to scourge Maizie and to betray her. There would be heartbreak enough for Diane the day she realized, finally, that he would never marry her.

Dimly, he had arrived at these conclusions as the sun had appeared beyond the purple autumn woods and he had dressed in the pale morning sunshine. Then he had stepped into the hall, and met Diane in the doorway, a blushing vision in wine-red velvet; she had glanced down the hall and then kissed him with sudden emotion.

"Wasn't it awful?" she had whispered. "You were a dear! I'll never forget it!"

She had run downstairs, then, and in the white-paneled dining-room he had faced that unforgettable breakfast party.

AMAZEMENT on Stork's face; grim lines around his father's mouth; the excessive affection of his mother for Diane; the poetical pleasantries of Patterson Shirley; the overemphasized emotion of Mrs. Shirley; and the humorous comments of Plinty—all had testified to the fact that it was no dream, no hallucination of his own.

Yes, he was engaged. Not married though—no!

But engaged!

The incredible irony of it had held him spellbound all through the hurried breakfast. But he had carried it off well, nevertheless—aided, perhaps, by that expectation of confusion and embarrassment which custom has associated with young love.

Only the brief moment he had with his father in the library had nearly unhorsed him; perhaps because it had torn so at his heartstrings. There had been weary lines, indeed, around his father's piercing eyes, as he had closed the library door and put his back to it. For the first time, too, his hands had appeared slightly mottled as he stood erect, in the morning sunshine.

"I won't keep you one minute, Tommy," he had said in an oddly steady voice. "You've seen fit to exclude me from your confidence. And I have no intention of interfering in your affairs. You're not a boy. But you are my only son, of course. So I have seen fit to make an agreement with Mr. Shirley—one which I shall expect you to observe."

"Why, of course—" he had begun to say.

But his father had disregarded him, his piercing blue eyes fastened on the distant view beyond the windows.

"That agreement simply is that there shall be no marriage for six months. You owe this to me—because I am your father. It is the only debt I shall ever ask you to pay. If you find at the end of six months that Diane still fulfils all your requirements—there will be no further objection. I imagine that is Will and the motor now."

The motor for the train had rounded the drive, as the door behind him had opened and Diane had come in, followed by the sound of many voices in the hallway.

"Oh, it's simply John, of course," he had heard his mother telling Mrs. Shirley in the hall; "John and his ridiculous ideas about young people not knowing their own minds! And he would have proposed to me without knowing my last name, I do believe, if I had let him! Do you remember those amateur theatricals in the Academy of Music? Every one was there—"

"All right, father," he had said with an effort at composure.

"Good-by, Di," he added. "I'll have to go."

"But I'll see you in Rhinebeck, day after tomorrow?" she had cried.

"If I can," he had promised.

"You can," she had said.

She had thrown her arms around him, before his father's gaze, and kissed him.

"I'll die if we can't talk it all over," she whispered.

"I will," he had promised in a kind of blinding mist.

Will had driven him and Stork, in a portentous silence, to the station, while a complete realization of the utter mess in which he found himself had pierced him to the soul.

It didn't make any difference, indeed, whether it was an unannounced engagement or a Chinese engagement. It made no difference whether he were going to see Diane at Rhinebeck tomorrow or the devil himself at the Grand Central Station.

THE only thing that mattered was the accomplished fact—and that expression in his father's eyes; and this intolerable, forward falling shadow which oppressed him now. The shadow of Maizie!

What in God's name could he say to her?

That question, indeed, had not been absent from his thoughts for one single instant since the door had closed upon his catastrophe. It had danced dizzily before his eyes all through breakfast, as he had tried to eat. It had beaten on his brain like a hammer as Stork had demanded explanation, information, and he had finally told the painter the truth. It had kept on hammering insistently through every note of the train's swift passage by suburban stations, through rackety freight yards, across the Harlem bridge and down into the tunnel to the Grand Central.

All Stork's reassurances about danger, about marriage, about leaving the country, had been drowned in its grim tattoo.

"You must tell Maizie!" it said. "What will she say?"

He did no work that morning, indeed; nor that afternoon. He sat in the studio on Charlton Court instead, hour after hour, until sunset had nearly come. Then he walked the floor in the dusk, realizing for the first time the true isolation of each human soul in any crisis of its existence. From no one could he get the slightest assistance in this affair! No one could settle it but himself! Like a tiny replica of Judgment Day, each crisis in existence was, apparently, an invisible extension of divine justice!

No intervening judge was needed for him in this case of Tommy versus Tommy! Maizie's ideas would suffice for that. Like little flashing jewels, they were, lying clear-cut and beautiful in the casket of her soul. Faith, honor, love, truth—each facet of each jewel shone clearly in the light still diffused from her childhood in the house on Highland Drive, in Syrchester. No admission in her that honor could be tarnished by kindness, nor charity impinge on justice—or love waver in the shadows of passion.

No; clear-cut, the world lay before her; shining before her soft, brown eyes, all known and certain, outlined boldly with the strokes of the Master Artist! Just so, and no otherwise, must people be!

She had begun to believe in him, once more, in these last weeks, since that moment in the Westchester woods. But this would put him on trial once more, with heartbreaking certainty of conviction. All those doubts which had assailed her in the months since the Riviera would revive again—doubts originally so baseless, but now, ironically enough, justified!

A susceptible fool, with a weakness for women!

That would be the portrait of him which she would see. Diane would play the rôle in his ignoble drama that drink had always played in George Mallock's—except that Mally's tragic marriage and cluttered tenement rooms, under the eaves of Washington Square, Mally's extenuating circumstances would be absent.

What a pleasant picture that was to paint! After all the hours of the idyl! After that moment in the October woods!

It was only nine months since Cannes—but his medallion of himself was completely reversed. He had considered Stork, he remembered abruptly, as one obsessed by women; obsessed since their student days. Now it was himself who stood revealed as the susceptible one, only troubled by conscience, subtly and indefinably complex where Stork seemed primitive and direct.

He had never successfully withstood Diane.

That was the plain, unvarnished truth. She had come at the psychological moment, it might be urged. She had appeared when existence for him had been overhung with a gray mist; when disillusion had held him fast in the ashes of a useless and forgotten success. But he had not been able to withstand the temptation she had presented, nevertheless.

The rest was self-justification, sophistry—what Plinty would call, in her ultramodern diction, rationalization!

HE REALIZED that, a trifle grimly, as darkness began to fill the studio and lights began to pierce the curtain of evening which descended on New York, shining in the back windows of the houses across the wan back yards. The old Italian clock upon the highboy chimed the hour of seven. In the kitchenettes that gave upon the Court, shadows of feminine forms proclaimed the approach of dinner in the apartments across the yards.

Seven!

And he was expected at Maizie's in an hour, to help prepare that picnic lunch he had insisted upon helping with so that they could get an early start in Jimmy's temperamental old Ford the next afternoon.

An hour! And it was only three days since he had said good-by to her. . . .

How incredible the thing was—and how apparently insoluble!

An air of hopelessness pervaded his movements as he turned out the lights, locked the door and went down the stairs to the street. A slight rain was falling, now, too, and in the Square umbrellas blossomed like dark-flowering night plants while the sidewalks glistened suddenly with the gleaming radiance of the unwinking street lamps.

He turned in at the Brevoort and sought one of the little round tables downstairs, dimly aware of the mirrors, the inquiring faces, the hurrying waiters, the white floor; and yet for all practical purposes completely unconscious of them.

"She tempted me!"

Well, of course he could say that, he realized, conscious suddenly of what depths of revelation the telling of his relations with Diane would involve. He could say that; he could blacken Diane; excuse himself; twist all the implications of the passionate embrace; retell the story of that moment in his room in New Canaan. . . .

Little devils of deceit crowded round him as he tried to eat the oysters the waiter had brought him; little devils, pointing out to him how simple it would be. But then his innate decency banished the idea, and the little devils slunk behind his chair. Why, yes; he could add lies, dishonor, deceit! He could throw to the winds the last shreds of truth and self-respect. He could stoop to the level of the liar and the utter cad. He could do all that if he wished. But he could never build happiness with Maizie on any such foundation. If he had intended to save himself at the expense of Diane, he should have begun in that moment the night before when she clung to his breast and his father and Patterson Shirley stood in the doorway. He should have dishonored her then, not now, word by word, inference by inference, in the dark, behind her back!

He should have repudiated manhood in that hour; not now, in another woman's room.

Did he also lack courage?

Was that desire to avoid the unpleasant things of life ingrained in him to his very soul?

After all, he had committed no murder; merely a venial sin; it was not necessary to marry Diane; it was necessary only to tell the truth about his actions to Maizie—a thing unpleasant but not necessarily fatal.

In the clatter and hum of the Brevoort he trod that avenue of his mind, seeking extenuation, seeking all the excuses that might render less bitter the unveiling of his soul, that might soften the effect of the blow, that might prop his resolution until the inevitable moment had been faced and conquered. . . .

Then he rose abruptly, called for his bill, and went out into the wet, misty evening of lower Fifth Avenue—and turned down the almost deserted length of Tenth Street.

"COME up!" Maizie's voice told him, through that brass trumpet in the wall of the hallway which makes a mockery of all human voices.

He ascended the stairs.

She met him at the door on the second landing, a slender, graceful figure in tan silk.

"Hello!" she said.

"Hello!" he answered.

"It was sweet of you to come back to town," she said.

She sat down rather self-consciously on the chair facing the davenport, as if aware that she struck an oddly modern note in the old-fashioned living-room with its high, plastered ceiling and white marble mantel. But he put his hat on the table rather grimly, without looking at her.

"Oh, yes!" he said mechanically. "I'm full of pretty deeds."

"Why, what has happened to you?" she asked instantly. "Didn't you enjoy New Canaan?"

"Not exactly," said Tommy.

"Why not?"

He did not sit down but came and stood by the mantel beside the fireplace while she looked up at him anxiously, little lines falling on her forehead below the golden hair.

"You know," she admitted, "I felt all along that you shouldn't try to come back so soon." She looked into the fireplace for an instant. "We don't always remember other people. I'm afraid I was a pig—to let you."

"Not you," said Tommy, and stopped abruptly.

She took her eyes from the fireplace and looked up at him for a long moment. Nothing particularly out of the ordinary in his words, so far, but a peculiar tone, for him. Rather a drawn expression on his face, too! Unusual in sanguine Tommy!

"Why, Tommy!" she said. "You're awfully funny. What's the matter? Didn't Mr. Shirley like 'Happiness'? Or have you decided yourself that it isn't quite right?"

With Tommy, indeed, gloom—extreme gloom and acute pessimism over all his works—was usually the herald of a completely new model of whatever commission he happened to be executing. Perhaps in this case he had looked upon "Happiness" again, in the light of New Canaan, and pronounced it "rotten!"

But Tommy did not smile.

"No, 'Happiness' is all right," he said.

"All except—" supplied Maizie.

"No," said Tommy. "The damn thing is done."

He stared at his hands—those oddly capable hands—while a little silence crept into the room—and a curious premonition assailed Maizie.

"What is the matter?" she asked.

"I wish I had never seen the pool at Rhinebeck," he replied.

"Oh, not really!" she tried to rally him.

"Yes," he said, "and Patterson Shirley—"

He stopped abruptly, aware of a sudden of what he was saying.

But Maizie did not appear to notice.

"Why, how terribly ungrateful!" she chaffed him. "The gift-horse— He hasn't gone back on you, has he?"

"Oh, no!" said Tommy. "Nothing of that sort!"

"Well, that's a relief," she sighed.

A man of insight who recognized Tommy's genius! That was Patterson Shirley, in her view. He had come, as if sent from heaven, at the exact moment when Tommy had needed a push to start him again on that career which the war had cut short. The only defect she had ever detected in him was his pretty, spoiled daughter, Diane. Had she been making things difficult for Tommy, after the manner of spoiled, fashionable youth?

"Was that Diane Shirley horrid about it?" she asked.

Tiny beads of perspiration appeared on Tommy's forehead.

"No, I—I guess not," he said in a low tone.

It was the tone as much as the reply that stirred Maizie.

"What do you mean by 'guess'?" she inquired.

"I mean—I guess it was my fault," he said in a curiously hesitant whisper.

A light like a glow came into Maizie's brown eyes.

"What was?" she asked.

"This thing that has happened," said Tommy in a low voice.

FOR an instant silence conquered everything in the old-fashioned room so that the sounds from the city street outside were oddly distinct—a taxicab chugging regularly, an Italian shouting to some one, a distant noise of cars, a rumbling omnibus passing the distant corner of Fifth Avenue. And then Maizie sat up straight, her hands taking hold, tightly, of the tan silk of her dress.

"Why, what has happened?" she asked in perplexity.

It was not about the Rhinebeck fountain, intuition told her—no, that was not what had happened. No work of art or ambition was involved here. Something else, something vital, personal!

"I never liked her face!" she said passionately.

There was something intensely selfish and spoiled, indeed, in those pictures of Diane which had lain on Tommy's Italian table—something which was not in the medallion he had made of her; something Tommy would probably not mention, even if he knew it. She would be capable of any extreme of vanity! That was the feeling her picture had induced. Maizie had not mentioned it because she had had a curious feeling of self-consciousness the day he had first shown her the medallion—a touch of jealousy, she had named it, born of the fact that this girl with the beautiful profile and capricious expression had known him before she did!

It came back to her now, however, amazing her by its unsuspected vigor, its hot strength, its clear revelation of the sudden jealousy and dislike which could dwell in her heart. She no longer thought of Tommy, of course, with that poignant fear which had been hers upon the Riviera and in the months afterward. She knew now that he was no such Don Juan as she had pictured him. She had attested her faith in him by that flaming-cheeked kiss in the dusk of the October woods. They had been lover after that even though she had not definitely accepted him. Were you not a lover when you kissed a man in the autumn dusk—when you kissed him good night in the vestibule of your apartment?

Yes; the new status of their relations had been clear enough for some time. But the passionate fire that lay back of it had not flamed up with any such hot strength before, as this jealousy of Diane suddenly imparted to it! This feeling that another girl had been trying to take him away from her!

Why, she could hate this Diane! And she had never seen her—nothing more than her picture.

"What did she do?" she asked hotly.

"She didn't do anything"—Tommy was trying to be fair—"except follow her own impulses. The whole thing's my fault! I should never have begun it—up at Rhinebeck, in the garden, four months ago—" He broke off suddenly, passionately desirous of extenuating himself. "It was before I knew you were in New York, before I began 'Happiness'—when I first came home from France! I didn't give a damn, somehow. I met her for the first time in New Canaan."

He told her slowly, carefully, steadily then—New Canaan, Rhinebeck, Charlton Court, Aunt Jocelyn's. He told the thing with strained steadiness, the blood of his Puritan, conscientious ancestors censoring every word of the tale. A child of impulse, Diane; an unheroic Tommy—but trying to be honest!

Ah, a difficult thing, sometimes: the truth!

LITTLE white spots came in Maizie's cheeks; her hands fell very still. But he did not realize—so intent was he, at last, upon the clear truth, the exact truth—the fact that he loved her, had always loved her, would always love her.

One hand crept to her arm, too. But he did not see it. It did not seem to occur to him, indeed, that there was no meaning for her in his words. No meaning for her, either, in that vivid scene in Primrose Lane, with the wind from the hallway blowing Diane's dark hair across his cheeks. Only real, poignant meaning for her in those moments of his with another girl! A sensuous, capricious girl!

Dim comprehension came to her of dishonor, of another woman's unscrupulous theft, of things untold! Stunning glimpses of a landscape of checkered, shifting passions! And, standing lonely and deserted, the figure of conscience in the somber shadows.

That was the story, the picture, to her, while Tommy stumbled on. He could have proclaimed ten thousand engagements, indeed, for mere convention's sake, to save ten thousand Dianes! And she would have thought nothing, except to admire his quixotic soul. But she could not stand one hour of passion in Diane's embrace!

All her old doubts of him swelled at that into a mighty wave of certainty that broke with shattering force upon her heart, magnifying a thousand times everything he had not said.

Quite forgotten was that instant when she had stood upon the street in Syrchester and heard Cliff's voice bitterly proclaiming her so "perfect!" Forgotten, too, was any comparison of Tommy with the rest of humankind—with that host of bronzed men, for instance, disembarking from the Mediterranean express. No; forgotten was everything but his comparison with her ideal—and his lamentable shortcoming. Forgotten all but his unfaithfulness, with another woman!

All that swelled into a swift, mighty tide of loneliness as she rose suddenly in the old-fashioned living-room beside the white marble mantel.

"I see," she said, although she knew she never would see. Across the sky of her understanding, indeed, was but the one flaming, red flash: Diane.

"I'll get out of it, of course," said Tommy. "Diane isn't a pig!"

"But you needn't get out of it for me," said Maizie.

He looked up suddenly at that, but he could not see her lips trembling because she had turned away. So he stared down at the floor again. That blue pattern! He never forgot it!

"I couldn't blame you, of course," he said steadily.

"But I haven't any choice," she answered at last, half in a whisper.

That woke him out of the mist he had blundered into, following the trail of his courage.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"It isn't love to me," she said, still in a whisper. "Love doesn't forget. Maybe you want me more than you do—Diane—now. But you don't love me. I couldn't give myself to you now—"

"Maizie!" he cried.

He had expected something, of course—but not this.

"Not now," she said. She faced him, her brown eyes filled with mist. "Not that I'm angry," she said. "You couldn't help it, perhaps. But we can't begin—like that. I'm thinking of gray hair—and the day my first lines come to me—and, perhaps, of children. And the path love has to travel with faith and God. It has to be all—or nothing, somehow; and—" She covered her face with her hands. "It doesn't seem like love to me—not forever, and ever—"

"No—" he said.

"So just count me out," she said. "And take—Diane. I think I would rather go it alone."

Tears came to Tommy's eyes, tears he could not repress, tears of anguish. And to his soul a sudden glimpse of the eternal things of happiness. Faith, and the ideal, and love. . . .

"I love you," he said, "nevertheless—"

"No, you don't, Tommy," she said in a low whisper.

"What—" he began.

She interrupted him. "I think you just love your own emotions."

She rose suddenly, her lips trembling openly.

"Please go," she said. "I want to be alone. You can see me tomorrow. I'm not being mean; I just want to be—to be alone."

An instant Tommy stood by the mantelpiece. Then he took his hat.

"I'd like to come back tonight," he said uncertainly. There was a hint in his manner of a suffering little boy. "Because I do love you—and I don't want—"

"Please go, Tommy," she said in a whisper.

He went, while she stood in the doorway watching him, and then closed the door. She did not cry nor laugh as she went back into the room, either. She merely sat down on the davenport.

Even three hours later, she had not moved. Only her hands had crept to her eyes.

TO TOMMY, afterward, that was always the winter of his unhappiness. Other winters he spent, of course, when bitterness and disillusion were his. But that winter was clear unhappiness.

It was a curious mixture of feelings, indeed, that he experienced as he sat nights in Bertolini's, opposite Stork or Jimmy Watts, trying to conceal the gaping wound which Maizie had made in his heart—a mixture in which pride and self-pity and that prerogative of the Devil, palliation of self, seemed to predominate.

Why, no, he was not so bad, he could think as he stared across the wooden table at Jimmy. He was pretty good. He had tried to do what was right. What would Maizie say to Jimmy? Or to Stork?

No, he wasn't so bad. Maizie wanted perfection, that was all!

A hundred times, perhaps, he said that to himself in the days and nights of that winter—and yet in the end as in the beginning he knew it was not really so and never had been. Maizie did not want him because she no longer had faith in him. That was the truth.

He had glimpsed that fact in his second interview with her, on the bench in Washington Square the next day. There had been no hint in her manner of any desire to quarrel with him. Only odd disappointment and a kind of burning pride. He had realized that when she had refused to make any more engagements with him.

"Why, you're engaged to Miss Shirley," she had said, with an odd, tiny smile that somehow carried no humor. "Wouldn't it look queer?"

She had repulsed him with a sort of passionate intensity, indeed, when he had touched her just once in a sudden rush of remorse. And the repulse had stabbed him beyond all imagination, with its clear, definite gesture that he had lost her.

"Don't you love me at all?" he had asked. "Just because—"

She had been silent a long time. "No," she had said then in a low voice. "I think not."

They had parted, in the softly falling November dusk.

LATER, he realized that Maizie was of different stuff. He realized that she saw love and faith and honor as clearly as he saw line and balance, or Stork MacDowell saw color and masses—saw them, and strove for them, too, as if they were her art, her struggle toward perfection and God.

They were existence to her; they were the quicksilver on that mirror wherein were reflected people, life, himself—the mirror which he had marred and distorted. She felt that with an intensity which dwarfed forever his own sense of beauty and perfection. Sincerity and faith were life itself to her—and he had muddied them.

Afterward, he saw all that quite clearly.

But at the time he had only a brief glimpse of it as he fingered the picture of Diane which still lay upon the Italian table, in the dusk. Then the swift results of his action were upon him and he abruptly forgot all else.

There was a dinner out at Rhinebeck: a family dinner, devoted partially to "Happiness" and the panels in the hallway but more especially to welcoming him to a family circle which rarely found time for such intimacy. In fact, Mrs. Shirley said, with a touch of archness, they would not even try to persuade Diane to go South with them now, of course! Miss Winter would chaperon her! How nice it was to feel he was such an old family friend! For once, too, their opera seats would be of some real use.

"It's like feeling the rope around your neck," he told Stork gloomily after that dinner. "Shirley is a fine old chap—wrapped up in criticism and books and ideas. He wouldn't ever suspect anything so outrageous as this in nine thousand years! But I felt like a crook. You wouldn't believe Diane could be so demure! By God, it's not my rôle."

At which Stork only grinned, and suggested that opera seats were not to be despised, particularly when filled by such excitement as Diane could always be counted on to provide!

"I SUPPOSE," Plinty remarked, "that I've got to have Diane to dinner now—and get chummy!" In the midst of the cigar smoke and Sunday papers which always characterized Sunday afternoons in her Sixty-seventh Street house, she sighed. "After all I said about her and that Marjorie Clinton!" She leaned back comfortably. "You know, it seems invariable. All I have to do is to say, 'My, that's an awful old goofus on that sofa there!" and it's sure to be Aunt Polly's uncle! I didn't know you were sweet on her. I thought you were dragging money out of her papa. I thought it was going to be the other one—the golden-haired child!"

"Well, we aren't married yet, you know, my dear," Tommy told her. "So cheer up—maybe you won't get her! Though Aunt Lib seems almost relieved!"

"I always do want to wear an Annette Kellermann at Lib's," Plinty admitted. "What did she say?"

He told her.

"Has father come to his right mind yet?"

"Not yet," he admitted. "No announcement until May."

"You'll be married by that time!"

"You can't tell!"

"I can! I've seen a girl or two before. Under the circumstances I don't think the wait is decent!"

"I suppose, a certain jealousy—"

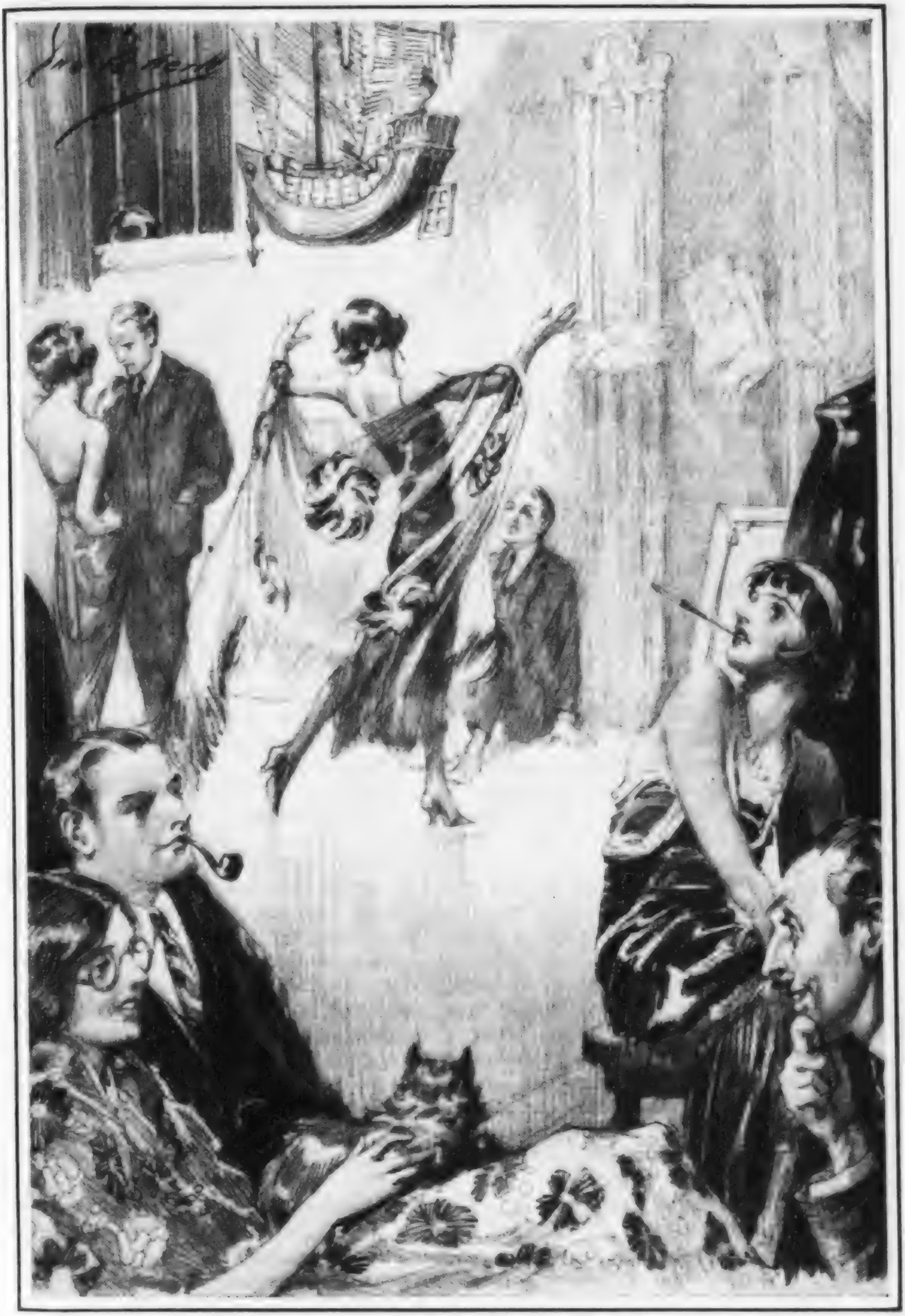
"The thought of your evenings makes me blush! This new generation belongs in a burlesque show."

"I regret, of course, your hindrances to such pleasures," he said politely.

And he abruptly took his departure for Sylvester's.

It had its humorous side, he saw—all this pother about a phantom. Yet it was not really very funny. It was not especially funny to deceive one's family and friends. There was little humor in the shipwreck of a man's hopes. There was more poignancy than humor, too, in that picture of Maizie he could not forget—the passionate intensity of her repulse, the glint of unshed tears in her eyes. The whole thing resembled more a lesson in the folly of weakness and amiability, and their consequences.

It was the realization of that, perhaps, that made him so nice to Diane, in the beginning. She was like him, he thought, like Jimmy and Stork—like most of these



Across the room as they entered sat Bébé Cantor. "Golly, she's got it!" said Diane. "Got what?" "Oh; you know!" retorted the connoisseur in flirtation. "Either you've got it or you haven't!"

men of his little circle. They too were dim in their philosophies, uncertain of their ethics; not over-flaming in their pursuit of the truth of life.

What was it his father had called them? Oh, yes! "Children in the art of existence." That was Diane's kinship with them, perhaps, and with him, too: the kinship of imperfection and a common ignorance. He should never have imagined for an instant that he could satisfy the requirements of any girl such as Maizie; he should never have tried from the beginning.

"Though God knows I can't see that I did anything so very awful," he told Stork. "I'm not perfect; that's all."

"What she wants is a plaster saint, I guess," Stork said, "something she can keep in her pet prison. And they don't come that way nowadays."

"They don't!" Tommy agreed emphatically, and turned his mind to that aspect of the subject.

Somehow, he felt, insistence on the inferiority of all men eased that rather fierce self-contempt he felt when he thought of the unforgettable silence in Maizie's living-room on Tenth Street; when he remembered the mist in her brown eyes as she had stared at the chattering Italian children in front of their bench in Washington Square; when he thought of the steady eyes of his father in the bedroom in New Canaan.

Why, no! He was not a plaster saint; men weren't, nowadays. All girls were not so particular as Maizie, either. Most of them were more like Diane: they took human nature as they found it; they did not set up an impossibly lofty ideal. At the worst, he had merely had an affair with Diane, mostly because he had not wanted to hurt her feelings; and the affair had not gone very deep! There had been nothing really awful with which to reproach him!

Would not Maizie see that in time?

A HUNDRED times, perhaps, he answered that question in the affirmative during the first month. Then he met Johnny Firth one noon in the Thespian Club—and that hope vanished forever.

There were almost black rings, indeed, beneath the Elephant's eyes, as he met him coming out from luncheon to the lounge with Blagdon. And the sight banished from Tommy at once the odd feeling of jealousy, of envy, which had sprung into his heart at the first glimpse of the big, slow-moving figure.

"Hello, Johnny," he said. "You look as if the new frontier was proving pretty hard to subdue!"

"Oh, just a lingering touch of grippe," Johnny said.

He sat down on the lounge; and silence fell between them.

Crowding questions were in Tommy's mind: Had he seen Maizie? What was she doing? Had she mentioned him?

But none of them came to his lips. Instead:

"I got the notices for the Listeners' Club," he said. "I've been meaning to come again—but unexpected things have prevented."

"I've only been twice myself," Johnny replied.

"What's been the excitement?"

"Work."

"I've been home, in New Canaan myself, and the Rhinebeck panels have taken most of my time since."

"I wondered," said Johnny. A slow, rather quaint smile crept across his big features. "In fact," he added, "I shouldn't wonder if you and I might not properly be termed 'stung.' It is rather a joke on us."

Instant emotion swept over Tommy's heart.

"Don't speak in riddles, Jumbo," he said. "How so?"

"Well, under the circumstances, I don't mind admitting that I wanted her as much as you did," John Firth said, laying down the stub of his cigar. "That's all I mean—but I guess Woodward will make her happy. In fact, he is the lucky man. Life holds some bitter moments, doesn't it?" He rose abruptly, and held out his hand. "I'll call you up for the next Listeners' luncheon," he said.

He walked heavily out, down the stairs, and sought the street; while Tommy sat in the lounge minute after minute, aware that the big fireplace, the club members who passed to and fro, the cheerful rattle in the dining-room, the picture of Edwin Booth that stared down at him—aware that everything had turned to mist. . . .

"There's a big party on at Sylvester's, tonight," he telephoned Diane an hour later.

"The Vanity Club—why don't you come in—and we'll go?"

"Wonderful!" cried Diane.

And they went.

It was exactly three o'clock, he always remembered, when they finally left Sylvester's studio and he and Jimmy took her to her Aunt Jocelyn's. By that time Sylvester's Italian wine had worn off sufficiently for him to realize exactly what had happened. Diane had kissed him again, and he had not cared. He had made violent love to her and promised to come out and call. They were back exactly where they had been six months before. He only wished she had not insisted on playing the record of McCormack's: "Roses Are Blooming in Picardy!"

Damn a man's memories!

UP TO that moment in the Thespian Club, it seemingly had never occurred to Tommy that he would go through with his engagement to Diane. After it, it was as if some invisible power had snipped one strand of the web and given it an entirely new tilt. After it, it never occurred to him that he had ever intended to do anything else.

He and Diane had blundered into their disaster together. Well, they would find the way out together. She was his kind, anyway. Maizie had released him. Now that he had set his hand to the thing, he would not turn back.

"Real love isn't to be despised," he told Stork heavily. "No matter who the girl is. It doesn't happen every day."

In the light of that idea he devoted himself to being as nice to Diane as he possibly could.

His view of her, indeed, was touched with a pity and chivalry which gilded her emotional appeal amazingly. They did not view life alike, of course. He knew that. She could insist upon sending Gigi home, because he interfered with her tête-à-tête, although dismissal meant the loss of half a day's wages to the Italian. She could push an old lady aside outside a theater, so that she and Tommy could get the first taxicab to take them to Montmartre. She could take the Amorys' table at the Biltmore and pretend to the head waiter that she was Miss Amory, even while the Amorys stood in the hall. She was intensely thoughtless and selfish.

But such things were simply youth. She would outgrow them. Back of her were all the culture and kindliness and good breeding of the Shirleys.

"A man might do much worse than Di," he told the Stork.

To the end that was his view of her.

Her actions from the beginning had been but the expression of her nature, unhampered by any of the restraints and inhibitions of his own New England youth. What had appeared as petty immorality to him had constituted only a natural, desirable ecstasy to her—an ecstasy which had stolen into her heart finally to touch it into sudden love.

She was an impulsive child, who had fallen in love, and been caught in a compromising situation!

That, beneath the situation, there might have been something hidden, something contrived, intended, and planned—such a thought never entered his mind, and perhaps never would have, had it not been for Stork.

To the Stork, however, the idea was distinctly more than a mere suspicion. In his mind was a remembrance of that moment in the Nest when Maizie's name had come up. Diane, he was convinced, was neither so childishly impulsive as Tommy imagined her, nor so unselfishly in love with him. She did want him madly; she had wanted him irresistibly, that night in New Canaan; she still wanted him. But she wanted an ice-cream soda in the same way, with the same intensity, when they stood upon the midnight corner of Fifth Avenue, after an evening at Sylvester's, and there were no longer any fountains open! Her own way was what she wanted most. She was simply an egoist, bent upon securing some sensation.

From the beginning that had been his conviction about her—a conviction which had been deepened, if anything, by everything he had seen of her since Tommy had introduced them in the Charlton Court studio.

New Canaan had merely confirmed it.

She had tricked Tommy. He was sure of it.

"Though there is no proof, of course," he told himself rather oddly. "And no likelihood of Tommy believing it, either!"

To the Stork, indeed, the affair presented a very curious aspect. From the beginning he had viewed Diane—indistinctly, perhaps, but more or less consciously—as the kind of girl who might, perhaps, solve that problem which life was beginning to present to him: the problem of making a living.

He had been increasingly aware, of late, of the fact that there was more than a touch of the ephemeral in that fame which he had obtained in the dim days before the war, when he had first shown his surprising formula and the exhibitions had been full of his pictures. He had been almost painfully aware of it, as he had stood in the exhibitions lately, staring at the work of other and newer men—imitations of Cezanne and Picasso, with an occasional monstrously ugly yet forceful Gauguin. He had not needed the critics' faintly favorable reviews of his present-day work to bring home the conviction that he was destined to be a minor painter, and nothing more.

A minor artist. . . .

The realization had its bitterness. Thirty-eight, and a second-rate painter! With a growing conviction in his heart that he would never be anything more!

THE thing had struck Stork poignantly when he had paid his one and only visit to his old home in Minneapolis, three months before, and seen again the friends of his youth—business men, bankers, manufacturers, now. Fine residences on pleasant avenues, magnificent motorcars and expensively dressed wives. Such things had been the appurtenances of most of them. Possibly the failures had not been in evidence, he had admitted; but most of them seemed to have done well, materially, in life: the way he himself would have done had he stuck to his father's greenhouse and florist business, instead of following the will-o'-the-wisp, Art.

A certain bitterness had bitten his soul at the realization. He had neither fame nor money, he had realized, as a result of his choice in life—a choice that partook of the incredible, viewed from the heights of his present experiences. Why, in God's name, had he ever thought he wanted to be an artist, a painter? If he had had to dabble in color, why hadn't he stuck to roses, or gone into commercial work, into advertising, or publishing?

He had gone so far on his path now, too, that he had not the moral courage to turn back. He had deliberately surrounded himself, so far as the friends of his youth were concerned, with an aura of Paris, salons, exhibitions, Beaux Arts, Washington Square and Cubist abstractions. He had scorned the cold, common horse-sense necessary to impress the ordinary business man—had done it with a certain touch of malice, and a certain touch of dramatic intention.

Stork MacDowell, artist.

That was the mold he had prepared for himself—to find it completely hardened, at thirty-eight. He had scorned the material rewards of life for the mantle of the artist—only to find that it did not fit him; that beneath it were beginning to show the ragged clothes of the failure.

Tommy, with his sculptures; Sylvester with his country houses and that Trinity Place building; Henri Blyn, with his portraits—they were all forging ahead strongly, year by year, despite the interference caused by the war. They were forging ahead, while he himself was beginning to find difficulty even in paying the rent for this studio, with its one bedroom and alcove bath—could not have paid it, in fact, had it not been for this Mauritanian Building job. It would not be long before they would be moving over to Washington Mews or to Paris or Argenteuil or getting summer places at Provincetown or Windsor, Vermont, as success came more and more to them.

But he himself . . .

Well, for him, probably, the same old clothes, the Village Kitchen, and Coney Island of a summer night; and the society of a new crowd of young fools; in place of the old crowd of Macdougal Alley and Bertolini's. Lies, over the telephone, when people from Minneapolis came to town! More lies, when he went home at Christmas time!

That would be the future for him, unless . . .

Well, unless he wanted to take advantage of what Fate might offer in the shape of a girl such as Diane.

That had been the outcome of his more or less conscious speculations.

Her family, he had recognized, might never care to welcome any such alliance as he could propose, were the thing done in the ordinary way. But where a girl of Diane's type and propensities was concerned the ordinary way was not the only way. She was attractive, even thrilling. And above all, she was the sort whom he could fascinate unscrupulously and possibly fatally, if opportunity allowed.

He knew precisely how he should treat her!

All that he required was the proper opportunity. Everything had promised well—particularly after that scene at the Nest, overlooking the New England hills. . . .

Now, however, there was present this new and highly inconvenient factor: Tommy—and an actual engagement!

In an instant, Maizie had vanished and the whole affair had taken on a new aspect. How should a man consider it now? The only real affection of his life, perhaps, was the one felt for Tommy: an affection born of their days in Montmartre and on Washington Square. Irritating, yes; but the only man he had ever known whose unselfishness he could not question: that was Tommy. Long hours spent over troublesome canvases; fierce defenses, written and spoken, of everything he had ever painted—all had testified long ago to that. There were few friendships in his life; and that with Tommy was like a bright star!

And yet—and yet—of course, there was a point at which friendship ceased. Did it cease to count when a man was thirty-eight, and was conscious that he was not a fine success, and heard opportunity at his door, after all the years?

"God knows!" he said, in his chilly studio.

And he turned his mind to other things.

THE question rather haunted Stork, nevertheless, during the first part of March as day by day he finished the murals in the Mauritanian Building and evenings he went to Sylvester's, to Eva West's, to the Brush and Scalpel and the rest of that rather circumscribed round to which his lack of money limited him.

No, he would not care to break with Tommy. And yet—damn it, a man had to consider himself first! The world had no use for the artist. Cezanne, in that dirty attic; Rodin, dying in his icy room. The rule of the world was dog eat dog. And Tommy did not love her. He would never approve of or even listen to his own ideas—of course. He was a kind of blooming Galahad where women were concerned. Yes—modern women!

"You might come up sometime, and see some of my poor things," he invited Diane one afternoon, when Tommy was out on Long Island.

And she came. . . .

"I don't see any reason why you should miss the next Vanity Club party either," he told her, "just because Tommy has got to go to New Canaan."

"I don't either," she agreed, with just a slight gleam in her dark eyes.

And they went.

The party decided him. . . .

"Though it may not be a very good one, of course," he warned Diane, at the outset. "You can never tell about Sylvester and his parties!"

He piloted her up the stairs, his gaze fixed a little steadily on the soft nape of her neck, where the white skin disappeared beneath the dress.

Just the second floor of a stable, done over into a studio by the genius of the architect—that was Sylvester's. In every corner of it appeared its owner's admiration of things Chinese—Chinese temple wind-bells, lacquered chairs, pottery, ancient rugs, pieces of Wei sculpture, temple doors and at the back, high over the long work-table, a pair of tremendous, old blue Chinese curtains.

No matter what happened, Sylvester never sold these—and much happened!

As a matter of fact, the casual guest who attended his parties—he called them the meetings of the Vanity Club—had not been sure for some years now, of exactly what to expect. In student days abroad, the gamut had ranged from wine and cheese in fifth-floor attics to Roman banquets in spacious apartments with fountains; from Tony's filthy wineshop to feasts at the Grand Batignolle itself. His parties on Charlton Court had displayed the same uncertainty—due, it was rumored, not only to the variations in his own personal fortune but also to those of the mysterious family he possessed somewhere in Ohio.

Never any positive assurance, indeed, when mounting Sylvester's stairs that one would not be met at the top with cheese sandwiches and a pail of beer—or even a request to accompany the architect to the nearest Italian store, with the wherewithal to purchase the party!

Just once there had been nothing—merely a discussion of art and its critics; to which none of the guests had dared add even so much as a bag of peanuts. On the other hand, there had been real Rhine wine on at least twelve occasions, and twice there had been champagne.

Delightful uncertainty!

On this occasion, however, fortune seemed to smile.

"Champagne, Storko!" Jimmy Watts assured him as they entered.

He cast his eyes about for strangers who might have made possible such magnificence.

Usually, indeed, expensive parties were only possible as a result of what Sylvester called the Vanity tariff—a species of tax imposed as the evening progressed and the boastfulness or vanity of the guests appeared. By common consent, twenty-five cents was the penalty for any undue exhibition of "side." Undue mention of familiarity with great personages: fifty cents. Talk of press notices: one dollar.

With the money thus collected, delicacies were swiftly procured from the near-by Brevoort—the length and magnificence of the party thus naturally varying according to the state of mind of the guests. There was a legend, indeed, that once a party had lasted until well into the forenoon of the next day, because Sylvester had invited a visiting architect who had insisted upon reading aloud a full page from a Sunday paper about a library competition which he had recently won. By common consent, the assessment had been one hundred dollars, which Sylvester had paid.

In this instance, however, it looked simply like an ordinary gathering of the clan.

"Sylvester himself must have had a run of luck," Stork confided in Diane.

THEY turned their attention to the guests—Jerry Faulkner, in a light-green smock, holding a cigarette in her pretty, white hand; red-haired Jack Courtenay, with his heavy jaw and small peasant eyes, quoting poetry to a pasty-faced Russian girl with soft hands and gray eyes; Jimmy Watts, thick-necked, Irish, freckled, with tousled hair and a soft collar, grinning over a glass of wine; Goodrich, with his air of Beacon Street and snobbish clubs, smoking a gold-monogrammed cigarette below his tiny mustache; Barry, of the bullet head and thick black hair, his hairy hands ending in dirty finger-nails, listening with a faint smile to a tiny coquettish blonde with sparkling blue eyes and long bare arms; Stockton, of the fair hair and crude, ungrammatical speech, talking to a nervous girl in glasses, who might have been pretty in a black-and-tan way, without them. And, on a Chinese chair, a chunky, black-haired girl who laughed in her throat as she looked at Sylvester over a glass of wine, with steady, provoking eyes.

"That's Bébé Cantor," the Stork informed Diane.

"Golly, she's got it, hasn't she?" replied Diane.

"Got what?" inquired Stork.

"Oh, you know!" retorted the connoisseur in flirtation. "Either you've got it or you haven't!"

"She's got the vital spark, if that's what you mean," said the Stork purposely.

She stared at the Stork, her own eyes suddenly alight, while in the painter's mind surmise fused into conviction. Yes, she was just the kind he thought she was. She was like the women who glanced at him in Fifth Avenue busses, in crowded subways, in passing taxicabs—like that little Russian girl at Hilda Garrison's, that exquisite little Italian girl who lived across the Court, that frankly sensuous débutante he had picked up at the Plaza. Clothes, perfumes, paints, powders—all meant but one thing to her! Like that girl with the Titian hair and the sheer silk stockings in the Metropolitan; like Bébé Cantor, here, with her level gaze and strong, stirring figure.

"Let's dance," he proposed, as Jimmy Watts turned on the phonograph and a fox-trot sounded invitingly. And he swept her to him closely.

"It's time you and I had a chance to be alone together, anyway," he remarked, as they swirled back and forth in a temporary eddy among the dancers by the Chinese wind-bells.

"Why is it time?" she asked.

"Because I want to ask you a question."

"What?"

"What sort of man do you like best?"

"Big," she said promptly.

"With brown hair and blue eyes, I suppose," he chaffed her meaningly. "And—"

"Oh, not necessarily," she said with an odd intonation.

"Just temporarily?" he suggested.

"Why want what you can't have?" she replied.

"You never can tell till you try," he pointed out.

"I think I'm afraid of you," she said, with a slightly contradictory glance.

"You're engaged," he said dryly.

"That doesn't mean I'm dead and buried," she retorted.

"It just means," he remarked, "that soon you'll be dumpy and fat and uninteresting. A married woman!"

"Have you ever made love to a married woman?" she asked keenly.

"Sometimes one finds oneself in reduced circumstances," he answered.

"How horrid!" she pronounced.

"Oh, it's something," he said cheerfully.

"I'm not married—yet," she suggested.

He stared at her coolly. "You'll get something you don't expect, if you talk like that to me," he warned her.

"Oh, my!" she shivered, ironically. "How terrible!"

"If you were mine," he said deliberately, "I'd drag you around by your hair until you never looked at another man!"

"What else would you do?" she inquired, much interested.

"That's telling," he said.

Of a sudden he realized that some one had switched off the lights of the studio so that they danced in the dimness for an instant.

"You little animal," he said in a low whisper, "I'd love you to death!"

In the darkness he crushed her to him and kissed her. . . .

TO DIANE, her whole affair with Stork MacDowell appeared as simply one more of the little intrigues which were the spice of life to her. Two men, again—desiring her, fighting for her, even though the clash was silent, hidden!

The drama of that thrilled her.

When she danced with Stork, she could gaze into his eyes. When she stood near him in the studio, she could draw just a trifle closer so that the perfume and aroma of her might intoxicate him. At an unexpected noise upon the street, she could nervously seize his arm and feel the thrilling result.

The vivid jealousy which had swept her in New Canaan had vanished. But here was the fresh emotion which her soul required. She adored Tommy, of course! No other man would have saved her as he had. But the Stork was like a new wine which must be tasted, too, in order to give variety.

"He's really thrilling, my dear," she told Marjorie Clinton. "And different!"

He was as vulgar and as frightfully, wittily sarcastic as any man she had ever imagined. He swore magnificently—fearful oaths, French and English mixed! She acknowledged a distinct sensation from him. He was primitive, reckless, hopelessly unpredictable!

"But what does Tommy say?" inquired Marjorie.

"Oh, Tommy!" said Diane scornfully. "He doesn't say anything! He doesn't know it! He's just a nice old dear!"

To tell Tommy, clearly, was unnecessary. She might be through with the Stork tomorrow. What was the use of going into that?

"I don't have to report to him, do I," she demanded of the Stork, "every time I want a little fun? What's the idea?"

"There isn't any such idea," proclaimed the Stork.

So their affair began—although few people would have called it that. It seemed so slight.

Had it been otherwise, indeed, Tommy must have noticed some of the incidents that happened early in April—the day when Diane left him standing downstairs for nearly an hour, outside the Mauritanian Building, while she went up to give Stork a book on modern art criticism; the night when she refused to leave Sylvester's until after the painter had arrived; the cessation of all remarks about Diane by the painter; the Sunday noon at the Brevoort, where it slipped out, while he and Stork breakfasted, that the painter—who never went north of the Metropolitan Museum if he could avoid it—had been in Rhinebeck only the day before.

Under ordinary circumstances, some one of these incidents might have made its impression upon him, trivial as they all were. But that week happened to be the week he met Maizie again—for the one and only time!—and so they passed unnoticed.

All he could think of at the moment was the incredible emotion which the sight of her had roused in him once more. He could barely hear the Stork talking in the Brevoort breakfast room.

There had been a kind of clear sunshine in the air as he had gone down Tenth Street—clear sunshine and a deep blue sky that seemed to hold in its keen, cool depths a promise of spring: an atmosphere through which the lines of the old houses seemed to be etched with surprising distinctness; an atmosphere which brought back to him in some mysterious manner, memories of New Canaan.

There had been a kind of slumbering emotion in his heart even before he had rounded the corner of Fifth Avenue by the churchyard, with its bare lawn within the iron railings.

Then he had caught sight of Maizie, turning in at the church gate—her hand upon a man's arm, familiarly.

Maizie! In a light-blue hat, with just a hint of Puritan bonnet in its shape, crushed down over her golden hair; and in her brown eyes that mist.

Maizie!

Emotion had caught him by the throat with a sudden clutch that had nearly strangled him. Maizie and New Canaan, and the Sunday mornings of childhood; the sidewalks beneath the old elms, and his grandfather's mottled hands on his gold-headed cane; youth's dreams and soul of honor—all had been mixed, somehow, in the emotion which had brought him to a dead halt upon the sidewalk, his hands clenched behind him.

He had with difficulty restrained himself from crying her name aloud.

"Maizie!"

It had been a whisper.

Then he had crossed the street, leaving her standing by the gate, gazing after him while he went, in his soul cold realization that he was doing an insane thing—but he could not stay and talk to her! He must get away! He must blot it out!

Inexplicable, but absolutely true. . . .

"Let's go rout out Rudy," he proposed to Stork, interrupting him in the midst of his labored explanation about Rhinebeck and Diane. "I feel the need of gin!"

They went, leaving the explanation forever unfinished—and unnoticed!

There were some nights directly after that, indeed, when Stork could have kissed Diane beneath his very eyes and Tommy would not have seen it.

"You're drinking too much," Johnny Firth advised him.

"There are worse things," replied Tommy. And he endeavored to escape his memories once more.

All the hours he spent with Diane, all the evenings he spent with Stork and Jimmy, all those parties he attended, during the last two weeks of April, were that and nothing more.

"REALLY, it's quite insulting, John," Mary Dumbarton told her husband at breakfast in the white-paneled dining-room in New Canaan, one morning about that time. "I had a letter from Eleanor today. They're coming back next week. We ought to do something!"

"Meaning?" inquired John Dumbarton.

"Why, an allowance, naturally! Or a house!" There had been a hint of irritation in her voice. "We ought to decide on what we are willing to do for Tommy—and propose it to the Shirleys. They certainly can't go live in that dreadful place he lives in now."

"It isn't so dreadful."

"It's impossible, socially."

"Are they going in for society?"

It was a calm tone in which he put the question; but Mary Dumbarton understood him.

"Oh, John!" she said.

The inference was that it was a silly question.

"Well," John Dumbarton said at last, "I suppose there is no use in beating about the bush." He took out a cigar and looked at it. "I don't propose to do anything for Tommy."

Distinct silence fell in the breakfast room.

"For your only son?"

"For my only son."

Mary Dumbarton's hands closed softly.

"Just why not?"

"Because I don't want his life ruined."

"You mean," she asked a little coldly, "because you don't happen to like Diane?"

"She is entertaining," he had admitted.

"But—"

"Not a good wife for him."

"No matter if he loves her?"

"Her name is Shirley," John Dumbarton said, irrelevantly.

Mary Dumbarton controlled herself with an effort. "I wonder," she said, "if you realize that you are acting a good deal like an old fool."

"I imagine you would think so," John Dumbarton agreed.

"I don't think I understand you."

"You never have," he answered her.

Conversational lightness returned to Mary Dumbarton.

"But, John," she pointed out, "you really haven't anything definite against Diane—just a prejudice. And after all it's Tommy who has to be satisfied: not us. She has youth and prettiness and family and money and position. It's pretty formidable."

"Not to me," John Dumbarton said.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"They can pass away," he answered enigmatically.

"So can anything, for that matter," she retorted.

"Not everything," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"Unselfishness," he replied. "Or truth."

He lit his cigar rather carefully, while she went straight to her desk and penned a letter to Tommy.

To Tommy it was like an unexpected bombshell in a fool's paradise—waking him with a crash to the realities of life; waking him to a realization of the length of time the engagement had lasted, to the swift passage of the days since Christmas, to the manner in which he was making a fool of himself.

A LONG time he sat with that letter, indeed, in the studio; before him a glimpse of New Canaan and his father's self-contained figure by the fire, listening in silence, as always, to the vibrant flow of conversation from the white-haired woman by the lamp.

This was not simply a letter, he realized. It was more a symbol of the loneliness, the unhappiness, the deception which had crept into his relations with every one since the day he met Diane.

He had felt that poignantly, the one week-end he had gone home before his father and mother had gone to Bermuda. He had felt it walking to church with his father, down the stone sidewalks, under the elms, to the familiar quiet church where the thinly scattered congregation sat among the white pews on the red mohair cushions. He felt it now, with this letter in his hand, speaking of all the endless arguments and harangues that must have gone on in the house in Primrose Lane.

Somehow, he seemed to be so singularly alone in this thing—in everything.

And yet . . .

"It's gone far enough, I suppose," he told Stork, in Bertolini's. "I'm going to stop all this nonsense and settle down."

"Why, what's happened?" inquired Stork, after an instant's pause.

"The Shirleys are coming home next week," he answered.

He thought: "It makes no difference, after ten years, who you married!"

"I see," the Stork said, with an odd constraint.

There were deep lines in Tommy's face, he noticed.

"For God's sake," said Tommy, "finish your murals and let's all three meet in Paris or Spain—I'm sick of New York, I guess. I'll pay the expenses. You paid 'em to Munich—it seems a thousand years ago."

"We could, I suppose," Stork admitted.

"You could do some Spanish stuff—like your New Mexican series."

"Why—" said Stork, and hesitated. "I'll think it over, and tell you my decision tomorrow."

"Oh, to hell with tomorrow!" exclaimed Tommy. "You'll come. Why not?"

"Maybe Diane wouldn't like it."

"You know she would," said Tommy. "This isn't a bourgeois wedding trip!"

"Well," said Stork, "maybe I will." And he rose in Bertolini's and called for his bill. "I've got to get down to the building before this sun fades," he said. "I'll see you tonight at the Vanity Club. Are you bringing Diane?"

"Yes."

"Good," said Stork.

And he walked out of Bertolini's, leaving Tommy still sitting at the wooden table, the letter crumpled in his pocket.

That fateful night at the Vanity Club was to work a profound change in Tommy's life and to give it a more solid foundation—as you will learn in the conclusion of Mr. Bellamy's novel, in March EVERYBODY'S, out February 14.

The Greatest Lover

When Two Different Men Plainly Want a Girl to Marry Them and She Likes Both Awfully Well but Can't Be Sure She Loves Either, What Is the Poor Girl to Do?

By John Farrar

IT WAS too glorious a morning for a girl of twenty to be forced to reflect that she had passed a sleepless night. Long Island Sound was a restless blue and gold mass of choppy waves. The gardens of Chester Coyt's Oyster Bay estate were as fresh and as youthfully gay as his only daughter should have been. Nancy Coyt slammed the door of the bath house viciously, shook out her bright green bathing-suit, looked into the mirror and saw that her eyes were red, threw first one slipper, then another into a corner and began to slip from her sport clothes.

"Why can't they let you alone?" she shouted, apparently to the large black spider moving as swiftly as he was able across the cement floor. No one was molesting the spider, so it was clear that Nancy was generalizing, that she had come face to face on this bright summer morning with the fact that some person or other is always interfering with the steady progress of life as we'd like to lead it. With Nancy, the interference was, at this point, largely emotional. Marriage! Why should she marry? She supposed it was time that she did; but she didn't want to be bothered. Why couldn't she go on being nice to one boy after another, or, preferably, to three or four at a time? It was absurd that this should have happened to her. It was not only absurd, it was inconvenient. She wanted to go to France in August and here was life all of a sudden becoming complicated! Was she in love? She might have denied it, but she didn't—well, she guessed she was in love. Her sleepless night forced her to that admission. She wasn't accustomed to sleepless nights. Love itself was simple enough—if you were in love with a perfectly respectable man and he was in love with you. But with whom was she in love? There, Nancy Coyt, twenty, exceedingly wealthy, exceedingly beautiful and, at the moment, exceedingly worried, came face to face with a terrifying fact. She didn't know.

Bob or Bunny, Bob or Bunny, Bob or Bunny—those two words came to sing idiotically through her tired brain. Ever since she had left the dance at the Piping Rock Club early the night before—Bob and Bunny, Bob and Bunny, Gosh how funny—Gosh how—

No! It wasn't funny. She was absurd. They had both been at the dance, constant in their attentions, eying each other with polite fury. Bob Peabody, dreamy, shy, quiet, studying law, not handsome—no, but his eyes were violet, somehow, and wistful. Bunny Thatcher, active, dominating, voted the handsomest man in his class at Princeton, crack baseball pitcher, excellent game of golf, bond salesman—his eyes were not wistful, they were black. They took you in at a glance. They didn't give you a chance to think. Nancy was afraid of Bunny Thatcher!

Last night they had both asked her to marry them. It wasn't the first time. It was becoming a weekly performance. Yet she couldn't marry either of them, because she didn't dare let the other one go. Bob was almost the perfect companion—wise, intelligent, thoughtful. It was Bunny, though, she was forced to admit, who gave her the thrills. He had that quality. He could dramatize the slightest event. Life became an adventure the moment Bunny's red roadster whizzed in front of your door. He plucked excitement from the most barren hour.

She had run away from them last night, found her own car, driven home by herself. They had both telephoned immediately—to say good night. Poor dears! It wasn't fair to them. They were making monkeys of themselves, or, perhaps—and she laughed to herself—they were a bit more like grasshoppers. What nice grasshoppers, though! However, her sleepless night had resulted definitely in one thing. She wouldn't keep them waiting any longer. She would force herself to a decision immediately. That was why she wanted to run away from the house this morning, more particularly from the telephone. Bob and Bunny, Bob and Bunny—they would both call her before ten o'clock—to say good morning, and to argue persistently about when they could see her next; and she was tired, too tired to know when she wanted to see them. Yet refusal would mean a flood of telegrams, telephone calls, flowers, candy, what-not. Even marriage would be a relief after this elaborate and whirlwind dual courtship.

SHE ran down the walk to the pier, climbed down to the float and stood looking out over the Sound. Her father's yacht lay alongside the pier. A rocky point jutting out to the north and another one to the south formed a sort of cove, and in this harbor several sailboats and motor launches were anchored. There was her own thirty-foot *Dolphin*, slim, white, perfectly proportioned. Her sails were furled. She lay peacefully in the sunlight. There were no telephones on the *Dolphin*. Nancy ran up on the diving-board, and an instant after her yellow bathing-cap, her green suit and her white arms punctured the bay with color as she swam toward the sailboat, with long, easy powerful strokes.

Nancy had not realized that she was being watched as she stood on the diving-board, nor that her charms as a swimmer were being noted. Had she seen the young man hidden behind a pile of rocks on the northerly point, she would scarcely have worried, unless it had proved to be Bob or Bunny. She was used to being watched. She was used to being admired.

The young man behind the pile of rocks was well under thirty. He was dark-skinned and dark-eyed. His black hair was curly; but not too curly. His lips were red and a little too full; but their fulness was lost in the rare infectious quality of his smile. You noticed first his eyes, then his smile, then his hands. They were square, powerful and possessed of that languorous grace that often marks the athlete who no longer practices his skill. They were dominating hands; yet, somehow, soft. He wore a suit of palm beach cloth. It was a betrayal. The cut was, undeniably, snappy. So was the red and green band on his straw hat. So were the sport shoes. A beach bag rested on the rocks beside him. A pair of field glasses hung from a strap over his shoulder. He was using them now, to look at Nancy Coyt as she crawled onto the deck of the *Dolphin*, stretched her hands over her head, then sat cross-legged on the edge of the boat, supporting her elbows on her knees, her chin in her hands.

The young man found her thoroughly admirable from his fortress among the rocks. She had taken off her bathing-cap, and her hair, yellow, tousled with an occasional coppery note, cascaded to her waist. She was slim and muscular. Her skin was flushed with sunburn, her face at this moment somber, but even deep thought could not conceal its piquancy, or, at least, so the young man on the rocks thought.

He was still smiling as he put down his glass, looked about to make sure that he was not being watched, and began to divest himself of the telltale snappy-cut suit. He had not stopped smiling; but the smile had become one of determination rather than speculation.

NANCY, dabbling her feet now over the edge of the *Dolphin*, tried heroically to marshal her thoughts. Yet whenever she came with determination to concrete consideration of her problem, she found herself wandering off to vague speculations as to her general character. Were all girls like this? Did they all fall in love with two men? Were two types of men necessary for her happiness? Of course not! Her mother, for example: how happy her mother had been! She paused in her thought. Yet had her mother been happy? She remembered, now, little incidents of anger and frustration, perhaps too frequently arising in parental domesticity. One could not be sure. Other girls seemed, to the observer, to choose a husband with dispatch. True, they often kept a score of them paying court; but it was usually a sort of game of admiration, a mock gallantry with only a remote and teasingly pleasant possibility of matrimony. Still—how could she know? Perhaps, after all, she was like the rest.

Bob and Bunny! She would consider them, quite carefully. First, Bob. What would married life be like with Bob?

There would be a good home, with good books, with intelligent friends. There would be many evenings at home while Bob studied; not frequent theaters or parties, not much dancing. Bob would be tender, always thinking of her. He loved her deeply, she knew. He had no gift of playing any game of love. He worshiped her, honestly and sincerely. If she cared for Bob, it would mean everything to him, she knew. If not—well, he had no small masculine trickeries to awaken her to affection. Would she be contented with him? Could he hold her? Wasn't it a little like going from your own home into another atmosphere quietly similar? She stirred uneasily. It was comfortable. It was simple. She was too eager for life to take it at its easiest. Marriage with Bob would not be an experiment, it would be a certainty. Did she want a certainty? Children? Yes! Her children would be safe in Bob's home. Bob! She thought of him as the best friend she had ever had. She knew that he had never cared for any one before he met her.

Bunny? How very different! Bunny, who had paid elaborate tribute to the most popular débutantes over half a decade; Bunny, with whom marriage would be a constant rush of parties and quick undertaking of new schemes for entertainment. Bunny made her uneasy when he entered a room. He was direct. If he wanted a kiss he took it. If he wanted to see her, he usually saw her. It made no difference if she told him she had a headache. He would answer her that he could cure the pain. If he heard that she was going to town to do some shopping, he met her for lunch, shopped with her, and amused her by flirting disgracefully with the salesgirls. Her father adored him. Bunny was already highly successful in Wall Street—because of his golf game, she assured him, and he informed her that she was forgetting his smile. He was arrogant, selfish, wilful. Of what sort of home he would create for her, she had no vision. She would be happy, she knew, in his arms. She loved him.

SUDDENLY she jumped to her feet, with a little cry. Of course she loved him. If he were with her now, she would forget everything, all her speculations and doubts—she would be perfectly happy if he should crawl over the side of the *Dolphin* now! Yes—she loved Bunny! Bob was a good brother, that's what one said of the man one almost loved but didn't quite. Yet she seemed, at this point, to be acutely conscious of those wistful eyes and that whimsical smile. Did she love Bunny, so much?

What did a girl want in the man she married, anyway? She suspected that she knew hundreds of men like Bunny, and only one or two like Bob. What should she do? What should she do? She felt tremendously wicked—almost polygamous! That was amusing: "Nancy Coyt, Polygamist!" Headlines in *Town Topics*. And after the scandal had subsided she would probably end as the star of a Broadway revue. Oh! She was becoming rapidly more and more foolish. She had determined to decide between them today. What should she do?

At which juncture a dark head and a pair of brown arms appeared over the side of the *Dolphin*.

"Hullo there!" said a deep voice.

Nancy turned in time to see a slim young gentleman in a blue bathing-suit scramble on deck and stand there, dripping, easeful and genial.

"Weren't expecting company? Well, here I am. Sorry to butt in. Couldn't resist it. You looked so pretty sitting there—and kinda lonesome, too. C'mon! Sit down."

Nancy flushed a little. This was an original young man. Where had she met him? There was something vaguely reminiscent in the poise of his body, the assurance of his manner, the look in his eyes. Perhaps she had met him at Palm Beach. He was certainly fresh; but, she admitted, he was undeniably attractive.

"Who are you and where did you come from, Nereus?" she questioned.

"Huh?" his dark eyes showed puzzlement. "Oh, I came from over yonder." He waved his hand indefinitely. "You wouldn't know my name. Call me 'Jack'—it's as good as any other. Glad to see me?"

He smiled a joyous, magnetic smile. His eyes took her in hungrily. She shivered a little at the look. There was something romantic in those eyes. She couldn't read any meaning into them. What was the thought behind them? She was strangely at home with this young person. Nevertheless, he *was* unconventional. She must tell him so presently. She'd best send him away—after a little, after she had made an attempt to fathom the mystery. She was just about to speak to him but he didn't give her the opportunity.

"Aw, come on! Sit down, sister. What's *your* name? Eh?"

"Nancy!" she replied, realizing perfectly that she should have upbraided him.

"Bully name, Nancy! Grandmother's name was Nancy." He turned around to observe her the better. "Say!" he exclaimed with a wide-eyed, flashing smile, which seemed to involve amazingly every feature in his face. "You're beautiful!"

She gasped. She sat down beside him on the deck suddenly, frowned into his eyes. It was difficult to frown into those mischievous eyes.

"What impudence!" she exclaimed.

"Haven't I got a right to notice how beautiful you are? How could I help it?"

She laughed this time in spite of herself. She had forgotten all her troubles in the presence of this engagingly handsome young man whose talk was both exceedingly ordinary and refreshingly impolite.

"YOU'RE very direct, sir. People usually take a more subtle way of telling me that—"

"What's people to me! You admit you're beautiful, I know you're beautiful—why in blazes shouldn't I *say* you're beautiful? Now we understand each other, eh?" He moved closer.

"You astonish me." She was laughing into his eyes now. He was undoubtedly some college youngster week-ending at a neighbor's, playing a part for sport, and playing it admirably. "For directness you would undoubtedly be equaled only by an Australian bushman."

"Maybe," he admitted. "Must be right. You said it. Well, I've told you what I think of you. What do you think of me?"

"Well, sir"—Nancy flicked one brown foot in the water and sprayed him with white drops—"I think you're just about the freshest person I've ever met!"

"That's all right," he assured her. "I'll admit I'm fresh; but don't you think I'm handsome?"

She gasped. He seemed perfectly serious.

"Why!" she laughed. "Why, you're not bad-looking."

"You admit it?" He squared his shoulders. "Good pair of shoulders, aren't they? Don't often see a pair of shoulders like that. Say!" He jumped to his feet. "Haven't got any cigarettes around, have you?"

She scrambled to her feet also. "Yes—in the cabin. I'll get them."

He did not offer to get them but wandered to the prow and looked out over the Sound. As she was rummaging below for the cigarettes, he shouted to her:

"Got a pair of glasses?"

"No!" she told him. She had taken them ashore to be adjusted and had neglected to return them. As she came on deck with cigarettes and matches, she thought that he seemed disappointed about the glasses.

He smoked in quick, nervous puffs. His manner of smoking was the one thing about him that had not pleased some instinct in her. It reminded her, too, of some one else, or—she *must* have met him before.

"Please tell me who you are!" she pleaded. They sat down again.

"Certainly not, Nancy—and behave yourself, old girl. Call me 'Jack'!"

"Well, Jack, then, it's about time for me to wander home through the waves."

"Aw, no!" There was a tone of childish pleading in his voice. "You aren't going to leave me now!" He leaned over quickly, put his arms around her and kissed her.

THERE were several spectacular things she might have done. She did none of them. Instead, she admitted to herself that she hadn't minded his kissing her;

that she had known instinctively that he would kiss her. The last thing in the world she wanted to do was to go home; yet, perversely, she persisted.

"I must go home—there are a million things for me to do before lunch time."

"You're not going to do any of 'em, sister. I'll tell you what you're going to do." He tossed his cigarette away and got up. She looked up at him questioningly. He smiled.

"Feel that breeze? Well, ma'am, get out your chart. I'll undo the sails and rig 'em. Guess we're both fair sailors. We'll take a little cruise over to Connecticut and back. How's that for adventure? We'll stop at Greenwich, say, or Stamford—got anything to eat down there?"

She nodded. What a mad plan! Yet she wanted to go. It was a perfect day for sailing. He was perfect company. Fresh, with nothing to say, yet the sort of person who made her feel at home, with whom she was contented to be. Already she felt that she had known him for years. He was that kind. Of course she would go. A whole day's rest from Bob and Bunny.

"We could be back by tea time?" she questioned.

"Sure—with this wind. Besides, you got a kicker in there, haven't you? We can use the old gas if we need to. Hurry up, Nancy—we're off for a voyage of adventure. Let's get 'er under way."

"Aye, aye, sir!" Nancy laughed up at him.

He kissed her once more, lightly, completely in her mood. She was thoroughly under his spell and the spell of this gusty blue and gold day. Life seemed now to be quite empty of problems as this new adventure offered itself. Nancy was not ordinarily capricious; but today her mood demanded that she abandon herself to the mood of this agile and determined youngster who now busied himself at rigging the ship.

"Tell you what!" he advised. "You go down now and get out the eats—cans and things, I suppose. Just set 'em out so's they'll be ready and you can help me when we get under way. There's a good girl."

"Right-o, captain," said Nancy, and vanished into the cabin.

Corbin kept ice in the chest for use every day. There was always cold meat, lettuce, eggs. How she would surprise that confident young man who expected a cold luncheon of canned goods!

She was hunting for paper and kindling wood when she heard a splash, as if some one had dived from the boat, the sound of a fast motorboat approaching, and shouts. She left the food scattered about the cabin and scrambled swiftly up the ladder, shouting: "Jack! Jack!"

He was nowhere to be seen. The bay had become, suddenly, a scene of action. A slim black speed-boat was bearing down upon the *Dolphin*. From the south a rowboat had put out from shore. Along the northerly point several men were running. She stood there, puzzled and alarmed; the half-rigged ship was rocking unpleasantly. The motor launch was within hailing distance now.

"Miss Coyt!" a man's voice shouted.

She replied.

"Look out! We're coming alongside!"

The launch slowed down and approached cautiously. A pleasant young Irishman leaped from it to Nancy's side—then it sped on toward the Coyt pier.

The young man seemed very worried.

"What's the matter?" gasped Nancy.

"Sorry to bother you, Miss Coyt," he apologized. "You were talking with a young man here, weren't you—a few moments ago? I hope you'll excuse me if I seem impertinent, but I'm Detective Sergeant O'Hara of the police force."

NANCY gave a little cry, then blushed as she saw that the tall detective sergeant wore a pair of field glasses over his shoulders.

"I was," she answered. "He—he's gone now. He—he jumped overboard!"

"So I noticed, miss! Well, you're well rid of him. We'll be putting the handcuffs on him when he crawls up on shore somewhere. He can't get far in that pretty bathing-suit of his. What'd he tell you his name was?"

"Why—ah—he—he said it was—Jack!" she stammered.

"Precisely! Jack, the Great Lover, we call him at headquarters. He's usually pretty harmless. Flirts with a lady or two, runs off with 'em sometimes, robs 'em, blackmails their family. Oh, they do say he has a way with him!"

Nancy gave a little scream.

"That's all right, miss; he had no ill intentions on you. He was just getting away from *us*—that was all." He smiled. "Anyway, that's the way we'll tell it to the reporters. You see, he killed a girl over in Harlem day before yesterday! He's wanted particularly for that."

The bay suddenly became a blurred whirl of mad color to Nancy. She swayed over against the mast. O'Hara steadied her.

"Don't faint, miss, there's a girl—and you're well out of it now, miss!"

Well out of it! She smiled grimly as he helped her into the motor launch, and she assured him that she was not the fainting kind. She had swayed not because of any sudden realization of personal danger from Jack, the Great Lover—but from a sudden clear vision she had seen. It was haunting her now like an evil sprite, taunting her with dark eyes and malignant grin. Jack the Great Lover had swept her into a world of romance. He had flirted with her and she had liked it. He had reminded her of some one—he had reminded her of Bunny! and he was wicked. Was her feeling for Bunny wicked? Could any man with Bunny's appeal happen along and gain her sudden affection? It was—it was horrible!

A whistle shrilled somewhere on the southern point as they neared the Coyt pier.

"They got him!" shouted O'Hara, looking through his glasses. "Would you care to have a word with him, miss?"

"No, thanks!" Nancy shuddered.

"Well, I can't say as I blame you, miss. Take my advice: when the reporters come, don't say nothin'—just keep mum!"

She'd keep mum, all right!

As they climbed to the pier, she turned pleadingly to O'Hara.

"Will you explain it to my family? I'm going up the back way—to—to my room. You understand, don't you? I want to be alone."

He didn't understand, of course. Why should he? He didn't know about Bob and Bunny, and how much Bunny was like—she shuddered again—like Jack, the Great Lover!

She ran to the back of the house, past the servants, up the stairs, into her sitting-room. She locked all the doors, and then did not fling herself sobbing onto the bed. She stood looking at herself in a full-length glass by her dressing table.

"Fool!" she shouted at that winsome figure in a tight green bathing-suit. "Fool! You must marry Bob, of course. He is gentle, he is kind. You will be happy with him always. How long would the great lover, Bunny, hold you—or you him? It's absurd. You *shall* marry Bob. So there!"

She stamped her foot—stamped it several times, determinedly—then ran water in the tub, rang for her maid, unlocked the doors and prepared to make herself ready for the battery of questioning family that would, at any moment, let fly its first salvo!

THE next two hours were a rush of excitement: anxious father and mother, curious maids, even more curious butlers, telephone calls, detectives, reporters. If she had been an actress looking for notoriety she could not more completely have occupied the center of the stage. Once, they called her to the telephone and it was Bob—dear Bob! Of course he would have heard—of course he would remember to telephone. Should she tell him over the phone—tell him she had decided to marry him— No, she'd wait—that was the sort of thing that you couldn't very well talk of, over the phone.

After he had asked the usual questions about the notorious Jack and she had assured him that she was neither injured nor frightened, she said:

"Bob, I want to see you—can't you come right out?"

"I'd like to. Gosh, I'd like to!"

"Well?"

"But you see, Nancy—there's an important case—I ought to hear the testimony—you'll understand—business before—"

"Of course," she assured him; but somehow a listlessness had crept into her tone.

"I'll take the five o'clock—be with you before you know it—we can motor over to Piping Rock for dinner—"

"Sure thing!" she assured him—and their conversation dwindled through inconsequentials to a good-by.

She drifted down toward the library as she heard the half-hour day gong for luncheon. So much had happened in one short morning.

There was sudden whirring along the gravel road outside, a flash of red, a jamming of brakes.

"Oh!" And she was in Bunny's arms.

"Poor kid!" he was murmuring. "Poor little kid! I came right out! Thought you'd need me! Here I am!" He kissed her—and she stayed quietly in his arms.

Just like Bunny Thatcher—dramatic, but what comforting drama! She looked up at him. Yes, he was like Jack, the Great Lover: he was vivid; he was quixotic; he was—but—oh! But she loved him. She sobbed uncontrollably on his shoulder.

"There, there, Nancy, my dear! And when shall we be married?"

That was unfair of him—yes, unfair; but—why not?

"Oh, soon! Soon!" she said in a rush. "The sooner the better!"

He laughed loudly and gaily.

"Right-o! Is your father here? Come on, my dear—let's make it today. You don't want a real wedding, do you? That's my own Nancy!"

They were married in the little chapel at Latintown before Bob Peabody had even started to catch the five o'clock train.

AS THE red roadster whizzed toward the Connecticut ferry, Bunny turned to his rather weary but thoroughly happy bride.

"Gosh! I should like to have had a chance to beat up that swine of a Jack—what d'you call him?"

Nancy smiled. "I shouldn't if I were you—"

"And why not?"

"He did you a good turn."

"Huh!"

She leaned over, kissed him, and at the same instant thought, "Poor old Bob!" After all, she'd be happy with Bunny for a time, perhaps always; but it didn't matter: *she was happy now*—she loved him.

Reporters, alienists, the editorial writers in the press proclaimed Jack Shannon, alias Jack the Great Lover, an extraordinary person. Stories of his exploits occupied front pages in the Sunday supplements; but Jack himself refused to be interviewed, refused large sums of money for his life story, smiled knowingly at the bunches of flowers which filled his cell, the gifts of many admirers. The day before he went to the electric chair, he made his one public statement to a group of reporters. It was not a new idea, nor was it cleverly phrased; but, coming from Jack the Great Lover, it did seem to gain significance.

"You can tell 'em for me," he said with a flash of his dark eyes, "that *women are all alike!*"

A Valentine

By Theda Kenyon

I ALWAYS thought, before, a Valentine
Was paper-lace, held with a gory heart,
A rotund Cupid, with his gilded dart,
A sugared message: "Dear One, I am thine!"
I pictured some coquettish Columbine
Who snared poor Punchinello, with high art,
Till he—great, clumsy lout—could not depart,
And for his clowning, could but weep and pine!

But now—I know, O little Love of Mine,
Why men would hide them back of paper-lace
And rosy garlands, where pale ribands twine!
I, too, am dumb, when gazing on thy face—
And glad enough to say, "Dear, I am thine"—
In any fashion, by the good Saint's grace!

The Fall and Rise of an Amateur Detective

The Doctor Disagrees

They All Thought Detective Stories Had Gone to Jimmy's Head; but He Proved at Last That He Could Make Good Use of Them

By Robert A. Simon

Illustration by J. M. Clement

Begin this serial with any instalment. The story up to this point is here.

IN JAIL! Jimmy Wrome, sitting on a broken chair in his cell, laughed. He, the sleuth, was in jail! Flattering—for, obviously, he was there because he knew too much—and wouldn't share his knowledge with the constituted authorities—Brinze, the thick-headed local detective, and Kenworthy, the blustering district attorney.

It was a time, though, to take stock. Things were going to happen—and soon. Jimmy ran over, in his mind, the sequence of events that had brought him to this pass.

Everything began with Claire Barton, with whom he had been—and still was—in love. After accepting his attentions, after giving him every reason to be hopeful, she had cast him off, and transferred her attention to Blake Hesbe. Shocked and surprised to the point of illness, Jimmy had gone to see Dr. Hugh Farrigan. Hugh, to get his mind off Claire, had set him to reading detective stories, and had thus caused the sudden development of his latent abilities as a detective.

Then Hugh had taken him along to Leed Payne's house as one of a week-end party—and Claire and Hesbe had turned up among the guests. So had Eddie Endle, the eminent saxophone virtuoso. Payne had died, while his guests were all dancing to Eddie's music at Shuffle Inn, miles away. And he, Jimmy Wrome, had insisted, when every one else talked of suicide, that Payne had been murdered.

He had advised investigation of the gun—and had found, too late, to his horror, that Claire had bought it! He had gone to Charleston to trace Payne's early life, had come upon an old scandal that led, finally to the discovery that Payne had hated Claire's father, his successful rival in love. Now, because he refused to tell the reasons he had had for suspecting a murder, he was himself in jail!

Brinze had gone. A policeman was outside, and Jimmy called to him.

"Orders are nobody's to talk to you," said he.

"Well, where are the rest of the prisoners?" demanded Jimmy.

The policeman laughed.

"First time we've used this cell since old Ledger knocked hell out of his wife. That was before I was on the force."

The chair was uncomfortable. Jimmy took off his coat and stretched it on the stone flooring as a mattress. He lay down.

He woke up, feeling sore. He looked at the luminous dial of his watch. He'd been asleep for hours. The building was quiet. There were no lights in the corridor and no illumination creeping from under the doors of the little rooms. He called out. There was no answer. He pulled viciously at the bars. Outside some one was singing the

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tune he associated only with Claire, "Just a little love, a little kiss."

A little drowsy, more than a little angry, and completely bewildered, Jimmy tried to find his bearings, physically and mentally. That Brinze had conspired to clap him in prison was obvious; but the singing of the tune which had more than once unnerved him presented a new problem. Was it all a plot to break down his morale?

The melancholy voice subsided, and Jimmy waited anxiously to hear what next would emanate from the singer's throat. How, he wondered, could the machinations of Brinze be connected with this assault on his emotions? How could Brinze know that this melody carried with it unbearable associations and shattering memories?

But did Brinze know? Could this not be coincidence? It was a highly popular air, and might be sung even by people who loitered about rural police stations.

"Just a little love, a little kiss;
I would give you . . ."

Again the reedy voice intoned its passion. Why should any one be so fervidly fond of this melody as to stand beside a courthouse on a warm summer night and sing it without end? For whom was this serenade intended?

Jimmy decided that he was the object of these devotions. If only he could get a glimpse of the singer! Perhaps it was his shadow, the man who had been trailing him. The shadow probably would have a weak, tuneless voice.

"And I hear you whispering . . ."

If this kept up, they would achieve their purpose. His nerves, quiet for several weeks, were beginning to manifest themselves. He tried to walk them off. He couldn't walk off his depression in the tiny area of the cell. Again he jerked at the bars and cursed himself for wasting time over such fruitless exertion.

THE song died away. Jimmy sat on his chair, trying to think out his next move. Shouting and screaming would bring no one to his rescue. He felt in his pocket for anything that might be a weapon. A few cigarettes and a paper of matches were his only finds. He lit a cigarette and gazed at the burning match. He might set fire to the building—Gartlin had done something of the sort when he had been incarcerated in a deserted barn. But this was no barn, and a fire would not help him to freedom. Fire or no fire, he couldn't break through the bars. And if the fire department were as efficient as the police department, he probably would burn up with the building. This was no time to be burned.

He speculated on the possibilities of cutting through the floor. It was a stone floor, but it seemed to cover only the expanse of the cell. Perhaps he could gouge away the cement at the sides, and drop below with the flooring. But a pocket-knife was not designed to dislodge cement. Anyhow, the notion was too imaginative.

Sleep seemed to be the only comforting thing at hand. He rearranged his coat and lay down again on the impromptu mattress. Soothing as slumber might be, it proved hard to obtain. All manner of unpleasant thoughts assailed him. In a half-doze he saw Claire dragged into court, with Kenworthy hurling dangerous questions at her.

Kenworthy's jaw and Claire's bright hair folded up in a heap and dropped out of sight. A heavy rattling awoke Jimmy from an unrestful sleep. A policeman was slamming his club against the bars.

"Get up!" he cried. "Do you know what time it is? It's past nine!"

"I thought they woke the prisoners at daybreak," murmured Jimmy sleepily.

"They'd have to wake the guards first," answered the policeman, "and I'd like to see any man get me out of bed at that hour!"

"Oh! You're the guard."

"Yes, I suppose I'm the guard. I'm the bailiff and the assistant sheriff and the traffic cop—but what's the use of me telling you all the things I am? Get up and I'll take you out so you can wash up, if you want to."

The irregularity of the proceedings dazed Jimmy. This Pooh-Bah didn't conform with his idea of a jailer.

"Hurry up!" shouted the policeman impatiently. "Do you want to keep me waiting all morning? I've got work to do."

"What kind of work?" asked Jimmy, as he entered on a blind struggle with his cravat.

"Tend the shop for the wife."

"Shop?"

"Candy store. The Dainty Sweet Shop down at Main and Bausinger Street."

"You run a shop?"

In his bewilderment at this comic-opera constable, Jimmy repeated his question blankly.

"Hell, yes! I told you I run a shop."

He jammed a key into the lock and wrenched the door open.

"Hurry up and get washed. The boss is waiting for you."

"What boss?"

"Brinze."

Jimmy nodded sagely and followed the policeman into a small, dirty washroom.

"Don't use that clean towel," commanded the officer. "That's the boss's. Use the other one."

Jimmy went through a few motions with soap and water.

"Got a comb?" he asked.

"No," answered the policeman, as though that were the most natural possible question for a prisoner to ask. "But you'll find the boss's in the cabinet. Rinse it out when you're through and he won't know the difference."

Jimmy applied a beautiful part to his brown hair and surveyed himself in the dusty mirror.

"I really need a shave," he suggested.

"Barber comes in later," snapped the policeman. "If he don't come in time you can go down to the barber shop. Ask for Rooks. He's my brother and he'll give you a swell shave."

Mr. Rooks of the Dainty Sweet Shop and the Bellechester police force stirred restlessly.

"Come on down," he insisted.

Jimmy stalked down the stairs into Brinze's office. Kenworthy, in white flannels, a sport coat, and a brilliant neckpiece of red and gold, was smoking a cigar and tapping the floor with heavily rubber-soled white shoes.

"Good morning, Mr. Kenworthy," said Jimmy cheerfully.

"Look here, Wrome," Kenworthy said coldly. "You know more about Payne's death than you've told us. Now, I've got a simple proposition for you. If you come clean, you can go. If you don't, you can stay. Do you get the idea?"

"I get it," answered Jimmy, "but I've said all that has any bearing on the matter."

"You said you knew how Payne was killed and who did it," insisted Kenworthy. "As soon as you explain that, you can go—unless it's necessary to hold you."

JIMMY didn't want to spend more time in the Bellechester prison, even under the gentle supervision of Rooks. But what could he tell without incriminating Claire? Probably Brinze and Kenworthy had a pretty good case against her now. His half-dream of the night before passed through his mind. It would be heroic to languish in this curious jail to help Claire. But how could he help her from here?

"All right," he said meekly. "I'll tell you what I meant."

Both men sat up eagerly.

"I'll be frank with you," Jimmy continued. "I don't know who killed him."

"You said you did!"

The voices snarled in unison.

"I was terribly excited over—everything, and I said it, but I didn't really know."

"You suspected somebody," snapped Kenworthy, "or you wouldn't have said so. No matter what you think now, whom did you have in mind then?"

"Was it a man or a woman?" asked Brinze.

"You'll think it absurd," said Jimmy, "when I tell you, and in telling you I'm doing an injustice to an innocent person. I thought for a moment it was Stelke."

Brinze winked at Kenworthy.

"What made you give up that idea?" asked Kenworthy.

"Stelke hung around so much afterwards. A guilty man wouldn't stay calmly at the scene of the crime."

Both inquisitors laughed.

"This man isn't such a genius," observed Kenworthy. "I thought of that myself, Brinze."

"And I suppose you thought Stelke bought the gun, shot Payne, locked the door, and made it out a suicide," Brinze added lightly.

Jimmy bowed his head.

"Well, that was simple-minded enough for anybody," jeered Kenworthy.

Jimmy bowed his head a little deeper and looked up suddenly. The bowing had brought the blood to his face, and he looked as though he were blushing. Somebody in "The Rosenbaum Case" had used this ruse brilliantly, and he wondered whether it would be effective now.

"Such a maidenly blush!" giggled Brinze.

"I'd blush, too," added Kenworthy. "Now listen, Wrome. You know what it feels like to be locked up. Let this be a warning to you. After this, keep your mouth shut, and if you must do detective work, stick to harmless tricks. Now, we're going to release you—but you've got to promise that you won't say a word about this to any one, and that you'll keep your hands off this business. Another peep out of you, and—"

He paused eloquently.

"It's a go," mumbled Jimmy.

"Then get out!" screamed Brinze suddenly, and Jimmy rushed from the room.

He heard uproarious guffaws as he got into the hall. Quickly he walked to the street and turned the corner.

Then Jimmy laughed as loudly as Brinze and Kenworthy and any three other men.

"Not so bad," he murmured. "They'll be chasing poor Stelke all over town now. Acting ought to be your line, Jimmy. That Rosenbaum blush—"

He laughed again as he sought the barber shop.

It was not difficult to recognize the tonsorial Rooks, who seemed to be flattered when Jimmy greeted him by name.

"Quite a mystery you've been having here," remarked Jimmy, as Rooks spread buckets of lather over his cheeks.

"Quite a mystery," agreed Rooks, with the air of a man who might say more, were he so minded. "They'll get that woman yet."

"What woman?"

Jimmy upset Rooks' systematic plastering as he straightened up in the chair.

"How should I know? I never saw her. Don't twist your head. How do you expect me to shave you?"

Rooks slapped a segment of lather against a towel.

"Shave yourself, don't you?" he asked, unpleasantly.

"Yes—don't you?"

The retort startled the barber and ended the colloquy. Jimmy tried to resume the conversation, but grunts were his only answer. He had committed a deadly sin. He had blunted a barber's sarcasm, and his penalty was a moody treatment at the hands of Rooks.

ON THE way back, Jimmy puzzled over the weak-voiced interpreter of "A Little Love, a Little Kiss." If there had been a deliberate effort to break down his nerves, no better device could have been called into service. How could Brinze have known? But who was to say that Brinze knew?

Brinze obviously was aware of more important things. The barber's allusion to the woman proved that the constabulary Rooks was none too discreet and that Brinze imparted certain official secrets to his underlings.

Claire, he would assume, was in every way responsible for the gun: what further evidence was there against her? She had an alibi. On the other hand an accessory in the murder would be equally guilty with the person who had fired the shot. But why did he take it for granted that Claire had purchased the revolver for an illegal purpose?

This consideration somehow seemed weak. Claire wasn't the sort of girl who would present a man with an engraved revolver. Anything was possible, of course, but that was improbable.

If only Claire would tell him everything! Didn't she know that he would understand, that he would sympathize? Probably he was conjuring up a situation far more unfavorable than that which actually existed. He hoped so.

Jimmy left the train thoughtfully and walked up Fifth Avenue, gay in the sunlight. He reviewed the case from the time of Stelke's hurried message to his own farcical imprisonment and release. He brushed heedlessly into itinerants as he worked out the details on the premise that Claire was the motivating force behind the shooting.

He cursed Hugh, who had introduced him to Bernard Gartlin. He cursed Bernard Gartlin and all his stratagems. He prayed for the wrath of Heaven on Bernard's creator and condemned the inventor of detective stories to an unprintable doom.

"Nerves, nerves, nerves," he reflected, as he passed into Central Park. "I could be strolling here, enjoying the scenery and contemplating the beauties hidden in a great city if it weren't for nerves. Nerves drove me into this."

He placed a particularly drastic curse upon his neuroticism.

"But if Claire did it, why?"

He could make out a case against Claire. So could Brinze. Yet Claire wasn't a wanton murderess. She wouldn't have had Payne assassinated just for entertainment. What relationship had existed between her and the dead financier? Payne was gone. He couldn't answer. And so far as Jimmy was concerned, Claire too was gone.

He trudged to his apartment and lay down wearily. His slumber was short and uneasy and when he awoke he thought at first he was still in the Bellechester prison.

Through the twilight came an easily recognizable voice, singing quaveringly an all too recognizable melody.

Jimmy jumped from his chair and rushed to the street without waiting for the elevator. He stopped and tiptoed to the little area leading into the basement of the apartment house.

"So that's who it was!"

The shadow, hiding in a dark corner, was singing.

Jimmy crept up beside the man and grasped him by the shoulders. The song stopped suddenly. The shadow tore himself from Jimmy's hold and made for the stairs. As Jimmy rushed after him, the shadow wheeled and shoved him down the steps. Jimmy landed sharply on the stones, but leaped to his feet and bounded up the stairs and down the street. The shadow again had vanished.

Jimmy shook his head. He was stronger than this frail unwelcome adherent. Why couldn't he have had sense enough to knock him down first, to beat him into unconsciousness, if necessary, and to hold him a prisoner until he learned from him who was the principal who employed this tenacious but evanescent agent?

"Who's after me, anyhow?" he wondered.

He went to his little strong box and laid the exhibits on his desk. There was a threatening letter, and a false mustache, along with a marked copy of "The Porterhouse Murder."

"That's a silly collection," remarked Jimmy. "My nerves ought to be in that box, too." He lit a cigarette. "My nerves ought to be—"

As he repeated this to himself, he glanced again at Exhibit C—the Bernard Gartlin adventure tale. He narrowed his eyes, as Gartlin himself was wont to do when in deep research. Then he locked his trophies carefully in the box.

"So that is it!" he murmured sagely.

THUNDER squalls early in the morning —ten o'clock was early for Jimmy in these days—led Jimmy to believe that he could venture where he wished without the unseen observation of the shadow. Nevertheless, his rain-coat and his gray tweed cap almost amounted to a disguise. As he inspected himself in the mirror in the lobby he fancied a resemblance to Bernard Gartlin. Gartlin, in most of his manifestations, had worn a linen duster, but at least one of his million masks involved a rain-coat. And the tweed cap was so much a favorite headgear with the great detective as occasionally to invalidate his ingenious transformations.

"Even beginning to dress like a detective," thought Jimmy.

It had been long since his last visit to the financial district, but Wall Street seemed like a strange thoroughfare today. He was glad that it was raining. The usual loungers in the streets had been driven indoors. The younger brokers, of whom he knew many, didn't care to risk their expensive clothing in the downpour. Jimmy could make his way about without fear of an inconvenient meeting with an acquaintance.

Jimmy entered Ye Arabian Coffee House. It was a collection of rafters, old sporting prints—just what you might have expected to find in Arabia—and bare, pine tables.

The bill of fare presented a study. "Arabian and American" lunches were promised, and there was genuine Arabian coffee, which might be bought in tins. The mimeographed bill flaunted undecipherable names, followed by parenthetical "meat balls with sauce" and "roast beef." Jimmy pointed to the Arabian for roast beef.

As he disposed of the dish in a leisurely manner he watched the door. Men in rain-coats swished in from the street and sat inconspicuously at the wooden tables.

Novices were struggling with the Arabic nomenclature of the menu. The food, Jimmy thought, was nothing that could not be obtained at a lower price in any marble-topped caravansary, but there was atmosphere.

His contemplation of the economic implications of quaintness came to an abrupt end as Claire entered, followed by Hesbe. Jimmy was glad that he had eaten. The sight of Claire still paralyzed his emotions and dissolved his interest in food. So Hesbe was still a favored suitor. Well, why shouldn't he be? Wasn't he her fiancé?

Jimmy picked up the punched check which the waiter had dropped and made his way to the cashier's desk. He halted at Claire's table. At least she would give some sign of recognition. He paused hesitantly, and looked directly at Claire. Her golden hair glittered ravishingly in the mild glow of the yellow lamp. Hesbe, as usual, seemed pale and menacing in a spineless way. He was a human eel, and not so very human.

Was Claire oblivious of his presence? Jimmy summoned a light cough. Claire noticed it. She had noticed him when she entered ye coffee house. But she bent all too intently over the bill of fare, as though to hide in it until Jimmy had passed.

"Good morning."

The salutation direct brought no response. Jimmy grunted as though he had been struck by a foul blow and shuffled listlessly on. A hortatory clearing of the throat from the cashier prompted him to toss the check and a bill on his desk. He shuffled farther.

RAIN, rain, rain. Rain was in his mood now. Claire had given him the cut direct. He no longer meant anything in her life. His greetings were not even worthy of acknowledgment. He wasn't even a passing acquaintance who might say hello and receive a formal smile in return.

Disheartened, ill in several senses, and utterly depressed, Jimmy wandered home. Sleep sometimes had relieved him in this condition. He tried to lose consciousness. The bleak, damp day was ideal for slumber. But again, slumber was not to be captured. He tossed wretchedly. The old quivers began to come over him. What misery it was to be in love! It was worse than ever now. Once it had been a simple case of unrequited affection. Now it was complicated by murder, the entanglement of his beloved, double-edged clues, and shadows. Why couldn't he have let life alone? He would never tamper with his nervous system again by falling in love.

He felt feverish. Perhaps he had caught cold in the rain. He hoped that his discomfort could be attributed to the weather. He really ought to see a doctor, in any case. It was too wet for a man with a fever to go out. His forehead didn't seem abnormally warm, but there was moisture on it. He felt stinging pains in his knees. He called Dr. Farrigan on the telephone.

"Can't you come over?" demanded Hugh, who had been put out of sorts by the weather.

"I feel too rotten."

Hugh came.

"Been walking around?" he asked aggressively.

The accusing look disturbed Jimmy.

"I can't lie down. I feel worse lying down than walking around."

"You'll feel worse if you keep on walking. Sit down and let me look you over."

Hugh took his pulse and his temperature. He looked at the thermometer curiously.

"It strikes me you're developing into a hypochondriac," he said. "You've got a good pulse, and normal temperature. You don't need a doctor. What you need is a little sense."

He sat down and lit his pipe.

"First you worried yourself into a fine nervous state about a girl," he said. "Then you took these detective stories too seriously and worried yourself with the idea that all suicides were murders and that you were the detective who would unravel them. Whether there's something new now, I don't know. But what you need most is a change of scene. I'll bet that everything in this room reminds you of something that upsets you."

"Something in that," confessed Jimmy.

"Something? Everything!" snorted Hugh. "Another thing is that you haven't followed my instructions."

"Didn't I read a whole library?" moaned Jimmy.

"That isn't what I'm talking about. If you'd only read the books and let it go at that, everything might have been all right. Instead of that, you worked yourself up over this thing of being the man of a million masks or Sherlock Holmes or somebody. Why don't you take up golf seriously, or go on a little pleasure trip?"

"I don't want to take a trip, little or big," remonstrated Jimmy. "Heaven only knows what might happen while I was away."

"Enough can happen if you stay here," retorted Hugh. "But don't take my word for it. I'm only an orthopedist, anyhow. See some good neurologist like Villmers."

"I don't want to see anybody," demurred Jimmy. "I'm going to stay right here."

Hugh shrugged his shoulders.

"That's up to you, I suppose," he commented. "But at least you might run down to Atlantic City or some such place for a few days. Anything to get out of this atmosphere. You've got a pretty little apartment, but its associations are bad for you."

Jimmy agreed that the plan might be feasible.

"I'll tell you what," suggested the physician. "There's an extra bed in my place. Suppose you sleep there tonight. Sleeping in a strange bed may help to break up the trouble you have right now, and when you feel a little more composed, we can make the cure permanent."

"All right."

JIMMY sighed. Perhaps Hugh was right. There could be no harm in this short hegira, and perhaps the innovation might relieve the tension.

As he sat with Hugh at the open window that evening, enjoying the fresh breeze that blew through the streets after the day of rain, and looking wistfully at the sunset sky, the familiar refrain came wafting up.

"Do you mind if I close the window?" asked Jimmy.

"Too draughty?"

"No, not that, but—"

Hugh closed the window with a curious look.

The shutting off of the voice seemed to relieve Jimmy.

Finally he picked up a magazine and went to bed. The little room was inviting. There were no memories dangling from the walls and no reminders on the chair and table. He went to sleep without much trouble.

Jimmy wasn't certain how long he had been asleep when it happened, it being a series of shots somewhere in the street. He jumped from the bed and opened the window wide, staring across the way. There seemed to be lights in all the houses, and people in nightgowns were gaping from hundreds of windows. He found Hugh's door open, but the physician evidently either hadn't heard the shooting or wasn't interested. He lay in bed and looked around drowsily.

"Didn't you hear the shooting?" called Jimmy.

"Shooting? I heard a tire explode. What do you want?"

"There's been shooting in the street. Everybody's up. I wonder what it was?"

"A new mystery for you to solve," droned Hugh. "More work for the undertaker."

"Oh, wake up!"

Jimmy was thoroughly aroused. He was figuring on how long it would take him to get dressed and be in the thick of this affair. He wouldn't wait to be informed by a coroner this time!

"Oh, go to bed!"

Hugh propped himself up on his elbow.

"Excitement is bad for you, and here you go, hunting it again," he said peevishly. "Why don't you keep away from such things?"

"But somebody's been shot!"

"How do you know?"

Jimmy didn't know.

The commotion already was quieting down. Lights were disappearing and windows were slamming. A few men who had been loitering about the street were going slowly into doorways.

"Maybe you're right," said Jimmy. "It looks all over, anyhow."

Jimmy went back to his room and closed the door. He sat on the bed for a moment. Then he switched out the light and went to sleep again.

Thanking his host for a pleasant and almost eventful night, Jimmy returned to his apartment in the morning. The doorman, who generally greeted him with only a perfunctory salute, stared at him thoughtfully. The elevator man left his car and inspected Jimmy from a point of vantage.

"WHY is all this?" inquired Jimmy. "Didn't you expect to see me alive again?"

"It's this way," explained the doorman. "They shot up your apartment last night, Mr. Wrome."

"Who's 'they'?" he asked. "Who shot up my apartment?"

"Nobody knows. I tried to break in, but the door was locked, and when I got in, somebody covered me with a gun, and when the night man came up, the man had gotten away down the fire escape and we couldn't find him."

The shadow, of course.

"That's too bad," said Jimmy. "Take me up. You come along, too," he added, to the doorman.

The door was closed, but the lock had been broken.

"We left everything as it was," explained the doorman, "in case you wanted to call the police."

"I don't," said Jimmy. "That wouldn't be much use—not now, anyhow. Let's see what he took."

The chairs and tables had been upset, and the intruder obviously had rummaged through the closets and the bureau drawers, but nothing seemed to be missing.

"I guess he didn't find what he was after," observed Jimmy.

"Maybe we scared him off," said the doorman.

"Maybe you did."

Jimmy was looking at the bed. The maid, who came in once a day to tidy up, had fixed it, but of course no one had slept in it. The covers were wrinkled, and the pillow was in disarray. There was a hole in the pillow slip.

"You say he shot in here?"

"I certainly heard the shot," said the doorman proudly.

"What was he shooting at?"

The doorman bowed to indicate that he had had the honor of being the target.

"You weren't lying on the bed, were you?"

"Well, he pointed the gun at me, anyhow," said the doorman, defiantly. "And if I'd been there when he shot, he would have shot me."

Jimmy handed him a dollar.

"That'll help you cover the damage," he observed.

Another dollar went into the waiting hand of the elevator man.

"Don't say anything about this," Jimmy cautioned them. "As far as I can see it was just some madman running around and shooting. There's been nothing taken. All that I'm out is a little rest and two dollars."

The attendants backed out gracefully and gratefully.

Jimmy lifted the pillow carefully. The hole in it was made by a bullet. There were powder marks on the slip. Examination revealed that the bullet had lodged in the mattress. Jimmy dug it out, and laid it on the desk.

He lifted the mattress to turn it around. It wouldn't do to have the maid ask too many questions. There was a torn scrap of paper under the mattress. He held up the paper and saw several lines of scribbling on it:

> Don't make a fool of yourself, you are no detective. You are only making trouble for yourself. Let this be a warning to you. We knew you were out, but next time the bullet will go to the same spot when you are asleep.
> BEWARE!

Jimmy held the note under the light. He opened his strong box and dropped in it the bullet and the note.

"I wonder how Gartlin would figure out this assortment," he mused.

IF JIMMY hadn't stopped to test the door of his apartment after locking it, he might not have noticed the chalk marks on it. He had planned a day of relaxation at Coney Island. But the daubs of white dust on the door attracted his attention.

In the darkness of the hallway they seemed to indicate nothing, yet a white trail smeared across a door was not the usual thing in these apartments. Evidently the chalk formed a design, a design indistinguishable in the gloom. He returned to the apartment and examined the chalk marks by the light of a pocket lamp.

Some one had been trying to decorate the panel with a skull and cross bones.

"All part of the game," mused Jimmy.

There was a message traced under the design.

"The End is Near," was the legend.

Jimmy went to the strong box and extracted the threatening message. He compared the writing with that on the door. They were identical.

"Rather stupid of him," he murmured. "That wasn't subtle."

He was a little aggrieved at his unknown persecutor. The pillow-shooting of the night before had had its dramatic values, but this exhibit was crude.

"So the end is near," he reflected, looking at himself in a mirror. "No Coney Island today. You've got work to do, Jimmy."

He removed the chalk marks with a damp cloth and descended for an interview with the doorman. The doorman hadn't seen anybody come in during the night.

Jimmy stopped at the door, looking for his shadow. Then he walked down the street, up Broadway and into Mecklin's library.

Miss Quaid, cool and demure as ever, greeted him with her delicious smile.

"Are you buying or borrowing this morning?" she asked.

"Neither. I want to ask another favor. I must be asking a lot of favors nowadays, but I'd appreciate this one more than anything you've done for me."

"The store is yours," she said graciously.

"How did you know that I wanted just that?" he demanded.

"Oh, do you?"

"Exactly. I want to be the librarian for about an hour."

"I'm afraid that we couldn't pay you enough to make it worth your while."

"I'll pay you to let me have the job for an hour. How much do you want?"

"Are you serious?"

The cryptic olive eyes manifested amusement.

"Really. Won't you take an hour off, and let me take your place? I know the routine well enough."

"Well," she said judicially, "I would trust you here, of course, but I don't know what Mr. Mecklin would think if he happened to come here."

"Leave him to me!"

There was belligerence in Jimmy's voice.

"But why?"

"If you'll trust me with the books, perhaps you'll trust me with a secret. You'll know some day."

"That sounds rather thrilling, although I don't see any excitement in being a librarian."

"I do! It's about nine-thirty now. I'll see you again at ten-thirty."

"How very masterful! I can't disobey so commanding a personality," she went on, "and I did want to do some shopping. So I'll see you again at ten-thirty. The understanding is that if I lose the job, you're to get me a better one!"

"Not only that—I'll get you a *good* one!" laughed Jimmy. "Don't be gone more than an hour."

He watched her admiringly as she adjusted a gray feather turban and walked gracefully out. Here was a girl, who—

But there was more urgent business at hand.

HE LOOKED at the card indexes on the desk. He grinned as he learned what some of his friends had been reading. Finally he found two cards that interested him. He put them aside and looked for blank cards. A fussy old gentleman, who declined to pay a fine on a book a week overdue on the ground that the regular librarian wasn't in, interrupted his search, but he unearthed the blanks. He copied the two cards, substituted the copies for the originals, and tucked away the Mecklin records in his pocket.

"That'll take some explaining," he mused, "but so will the cards!"

He found nothing difficult about the technique of renting out books, although he was hard put to it when a mild lady asked for a book that he could conscientiously recommend as something that would influence her daughter's life for the better. She almost growled when Jimmy suggested "The Shower Bath Enigma."

"It was a great influence in my life," he said.

"For the better?" she insisted.

"For better or for worse—I hope," he replied, and she hurried out in consternation.

Miss Quaid was a little surprised to find that Jimmy showed no disposition to speak of his adventures as a librarian.

"If you find anything unusual," he said, "don't worry."

"I'll be worried if I don't," she said.

He stopped at an aristocratic confectioner's and sent Miss Quaid five pounds of candy.

It was back to Wall Street for Jimmy. He would have to interview at least one man—possibly two. The noisy ride was restful and he almost passed his station.

Blinking as he came up to the street, he was aware of a familiar figure at the corner. So Brinze had come to town! Was this developing into a race with Brinze? He wanted to know the object of Brinze's visit. He slouched carelessly toward the Bellechester functionary, jostling him mildly as he passed. Brinze whirled about.

"Oh, it's you!" he called out.

"Mr. Brinze!" exclaimed Jimmy. "Welcome to our city."

"I guess you won't forget your last welcome to *our* city," laughed Brinze.

"You have a very charming and unique jail," said Jimmy. "I've never seen one like it."

Brinze scowled at his levity.

"It's ready for you again any time," he said. "I suppose you've decided not to continue in the detective business."

"I'm not in the detective business."

"I don't know what else to call your meddling around with police affairs that don't concern you. But we won't need your valuable services, Mr. Wrome; we've proved our case."

Jimmy put his hands in his pockets. Hands often betrayed excitement.

"Against whom?"

"You'd like to know that, wouldn't you?" sneered Brinze. "Well, you'll find out when we're good and ready."

"No hurry."

Jimmy waved impertinently at the detective and crossed the street. What did Brinze have up his capacious sleeve now? Which case had he proved? Jimmy adopted the tactics of the shadow and trailed Brinze. The pursuit led to John Street and to the building which housed, among others, Hesbe.

The attendant seemed startled as Jimmy entered, but Jimmy acted naturally.

"What do you want to see him about?" asked the seedy factotum.

"Personal."

"You can't see him now. He's busy."

"I'll wait."

The attendant looked at him shiftily. "He'll be a long time."

"With Mr. Brinze?"

The attendant was confused. "I dunno," he mumbled.

"Well, it was Mr. Brinze I wanted to see, anyhow."

"You can't go in now."

"All right. I'll send him a note."

"Can't be disturbed."

Jimmy stood up militantly.

"You take a note in right now!" he said forcibly.

He snatched a sheet of paper from the desk and scribbled a few lines.

"Take this in at once," he snapped, "or I'll knock you down and take it in myself."

That worked, and the attendant took up the sheet listlessly.

"Wait," said Jimmy. "I want a receipt for that note."

An inquiring grunt was the only response.

"Sit down and write this," Jimmy commanded: " 'Received, one document for delivery.' And sign your name."

"What for?"

"Write it!"

The sparkling brown eyes and the clenched fists so impressed the man that he scrawled the required receipt.

"Thanks. Now take it in."

BRINZE stalked out of Hesbe's room almost immediately. He bristled.

"What do you mean by this?" he bellowed, waving the note. "Didn't I tell you to keep out of this?"

"I wouldn't be doing my duty if I didn't tell you what I know," purred Jimmy.

" 'I've proved my case, too,' " recited Brinze, reading from the note. "Since when have you had a case to prove?"

"The last couple of hours," drawled Jimmy.

"All right. You can prove it in the newspapers—like you proved it last time."

"I'll prove it in court."

"The only way you'll get to talk in court is on the stand, after we clap the old man in jail."

Jimmy stopped short. The old man! Brinze was aware of his slip, despite Jimmy's efforts to appear disinterested.

"Yes, the old man!" reiterated Brinze. "What are you going to do about it?"

"Why should I do anything about the old man?" Jimmy ventured. "I don't know which old man you mean. The country's full of old men."

"You'll know which old man inside of twenty-four hours."

Brinze threw out his chest fatuously.

"I can't waste time talking about things," he concluded. "Good morning."

Jimmy stood silently in the anteroom as Brinze reëntered Hesbe's office. The old man, of course, was old man Barton. So they had selected him as the murderer! "Chairchez le femm." They had connected Claire with the revolver and probably the revolver with Barton.

Again Jimmy sought motives. If Barton had killed Payne, he must have been in Bellechester at some time prior to the shooting. That point would have to be investigated. But why had he wished to put Payne out of the way?

Payne might well have had designs on Claire. Any man would have desired her. But even had he made advances—anything more was unthinkable—Claire wouldn't have asked the assistance of her father.

He hurried from the office to the railroad station and made a tedious local train to Bellechester. Brinze wouldn't be there today to disturb him by putting him in a cell, and the shadow probably wouldn't be on hand to observe his actions.

Bellechester was as sleepily suburban as ever when Jimmy stepped off the train. This, he hoped, would be his last trip to the rustic haven. He fingered his chin as he contemplated the road that led to Olean and was pleased to discover that he needed a shave.

The tonsorial Rooks greeted him coldly.

"That was a wonderful shave you gave me the other day," said Jimmy heartily.

The barber emitted an indescribable sound.

"I mean it," Jimmy continued with outrageous sincerity. "My face never felt like that before. We men who have to shave ourselves are victims. If you'd start a shop in New York, you'd be benefiting mankind and you'd make a fortune. Think it over."

He placed himself in the chair.

"Shave?" grunted Rooks.

"Shave, haircut, shampoo, massage and any special treatment you think would be good. I leave myself entirely in your hands."

Carte-blanche seemed to soothe the still ruffled pride of the barber, for he went about his ministrations with a wealth of tenderness.

I used to have a friend here," remarked Jimmy. "Maybe you'd know where I can find him. His name's Stelke."

Rooks deliberately resharpened his razor before replying.

"Used to work up at Payne's?"

"I think so. He was his secretary or something."

"Secretary—hell!" sniffed the barber. "He was his butler. That's the kind of big talk he's always handing out. Bet you don't know what he's doing now."

"I couldn't imagine."

"He's nothing but a waiter over at Kimmy's hash house."

"Where's Kimmy's?"

"Down the block. If you're looking for Stelke, that's where you'll find him. Don't move your head so much."

Jimmy closed his eyes and dozed as the barber completed his operations. He surveyed himself in the mirror when the ceremony was over.

"Wonderful!" he murmured. "Wonderful!"

Rewarding Rooks with another unreasonable bonus, Jimmy strolled down Bellechester's main street until he reached the beaten white shack which was Kimmy's. Flies and chauffeurs droned over the damp tiled tables. Stelke was rushing between the tables and the long, dripping food bar. Jimmy sat at a dirty slab in the far corner of the establishment and scanned the greasy cardboard bill of fare.

STELKE, carrying a towel, with which he mopped the tables and his forehead, stopped before Jimmy. He seemed abashed when he saw who his patron was.

"Hello, Stelke," was Jimmy's greeting. "Glad to see you."

He motioned swiftly for Stelke to bend over the table. "I want to talk to you," he whispered.

"I'm too busy," Stelke said hoarsely.

Jimmy pressed a bill into his hand.

"See if you can't go outside with me for a few minutes," he suggested. "It's very important."

Stelke glanced about. "Only a minute, sir," he said. "It's almost time for the rush."

"I'll go out first and wait at the corner," said Jimmy. "You come out about a minute later."

He left the restaurant and walked to the corner. Stelke came up to him warily.

"What's up?" he asked.

"Nothing's up," answered Jimmy. "I want to know a few things about what happened just before Mr. Payne died."

Stelke frowned. "Why do you want to bring that up?" he complained. "I want to forget it. Since it happened, I ain't been able to get a decent place. You'd think I killed him myself the way they act when they hear I was with him."

Jimmy shook his head sympathetically.

"When it's all over, I'll see what I can do for you," he said. "Maybe I can use you myself."

"I'll go anywhere!" exclaimed Stelke.

"We'll see. Now, try to remember. Was there anybody except the guests at the house on the day it happened?"

"No. Mr. Payne didn't have much company that he didn't know about beforehand."

"Wasn't there an old man somewhere about the place?"

"If there was, I'd have seen him. We didn't have anybody but you and the rest of them that week-end."

"YOU didn't see any strangers about the grounds that day?"

"No."

"Could any of the other people in the house have seen any stranger?"

"No. I'm positive of that, sir, because I got all the help together the morning after it happened and asked 'em if they'd seen anybody around and they said no, they hadn't."

"You were in or about the house all day?"

"Yes, sir. My orders was always to be about when we was expectin' company."

"You remember about when each of the guests arrived?"

"Yes, sir."

Stelke looked at the clock on the building.

"If I don't go back now, sir," he said, "like as not they'll fire me, and you don't know what a hard time I've had even gettin' this job."

"I'll walk back with you," volunteered Jimmy, "and I can finish on the way."

They started slowly down Main Street.

"Did you show all the guests to their rooms?" Jimmy went on.

"Yes, sir."

"Now, do you remember the storm? Were you on the ground floor all of the time after Mr. Payne felt ill and went upstairs?"

"Yes, sir."

"Were you there just before that—I mean before tea was served?"

"Almost all the time. I was on the second floor a little while, lookin' to see if there was enough towels and things in the rooms."

"That was when?"

"Just before tea."

"Good. Where was Mr. Payne at that time?"

"He was out in the garden, lookin' over some new plants."

"Not in his room?"

"No, sir. But you'll have to excuse me."

"I'll finish this in a minute. Was Payne's door open or closed all that time?"

Stelke fidgeted.

"I'm not asking whether you went in and out or not," Jimmy explained. "But did you see any one go in?"

Stelke nodded.

"Somebody carrying something?"

Another blank and unwilling nod.

"A small package?" Jimmy hazarded.

"Yes, sir, but please let me go now!"

"All right," Jimmy hurried on. "The person who entered closed the door behind him and came out a moment later, carrying the wrapping of the package, but not the contents."

"It wasn't a he," said Stelke impatiently.

"Now please be accurate," insisted Jimmy.

"It wasn't a he," repeated Stelke. "It was Miss Barton. I've got to go now, sir. I can't afford to stay away. I've been away too long already."

SEVERAL hours later, Jimmy telephoned to Hugh.

"What did you say was the name of that neurologist?" he asked.

"You sound as though you'd been shot," said Hugh. "I guess it's time for you to see a neurologist. Villmers is his name. He's at the hospital. "

"Your hospital?"

"Yes. I'll give you a card to him."

"Never mind."

Jimmy struggled to the hospital and found the office of Dr. Villmers. The neurologist was a tall, slender man, with inquiring brown eyes and a handsome brown beard. He looked alert but there was a world-weary manner about him. He was a man who had listened to many sorrows. The interview was brief, and Jimmy emerged from the office with a sad smile.

"I hope this won't be an extended treatment," he thought, "but it seems to be what I needed."

When he returned home, he found a note on his door.

"More threats?" he murmured.

But it was only a message to ring a number. The number gave Jimmy all sorts of palpitations. His hands bobbed about as he called it, and he swayed on the chair until an answering voice came over the wire.

"Oh, Jimmy!"

Fear and relief were in Claire's voice.

"You must have been surprised when you got my message," she went on hurriedly, "and I hated to call you up—after everything."

"It's all right."

"That's good of you, Jimmy. But, Jimmy—I know how you feel and I—"

"What is it?"

"Jimmy, we're in trouble."

A heavy breath.

"Who's 'we'?"

"Father and I—all of us." The words rushed now. "Jimmy, father's been arrested for the death of Mr. Payne and I'm going mad! Jimmy—I wanted to tell you, I thought—"

"You thought I might help you out?"

He stamped his foot angrily as he realized the brutality of the question.

A sob was Claire's only answer.

"Is there a hearing?" Jimmy asked.

"There's to be an informal hearing before the district attorney tonight."

"Where?"

"In Bellechester."

"Have you retained a lawyer?"

"Yes—Mr. Durand."

"I see. I don't know why you've called on me, Claire. I asked you to tell me everything and you wouldn't—"

"Oh, please, Jimmy!" she implored. "I was so wrong about everything. Do help me—"

"Listen, Claire. There are reasons why I wouldn't be allowed to attend any hearing conducted by the authorities in Bellechester. I don't think they like me. Now, I want you to tell Mr. Durand this: He must have me there tonight. This preliminary examination by the district attorney isn't of legal consequence, although anything your father says can be held against him. I want to be there as Mr. Durand's secretary. I can't explain this now, and I may do nothing but listen tonight. That's about all I can do for the present."

Jimmy hung up the receiver on her tearful thanks. He went to the cabinet, withdrew his strong box, and called a taxi.

"You're safer in a safe-deposit vault right now," Jimmy remarked to the box.

He felt relieved when he had a receipt for his treasure. And somehow he managed to sleep quietly for several hours until it was time to go to Bellechester. A great man was Dr. Villmers!

BARTON was a sullen, frightened figure, Mrs. Barton was a quivering, frightened figure, Claire was a beautiful, frightened figure, Durant was a quiet, efficient figure. Brinze and Kenworthy wore scowls and fumed at Jimmy's presence, but Durand was obdurate. His client had a right to have counsel, and counsel had a right to have assistance.

Kenworthy shrugged his shoulders in disgust and motioned for Brinze to end his protests.

"He doesn't matter, anyhow," he said, pointing to Jimmy with his jaw. "We'll begin this thing now, and I expect direct answers to all of my questions. The manner in which Mr. Barton answers will count as heavily as the matter of his answers. I don't want to indict any one on so grave a charge, but it's my duty to see that justice is done, painful as it may be."

He sat at Brinze's desk, and arranged a pile of memoranda.

"I'll begin, Mr. Barton, by asking whether you had had at any time personal acquaintance with Leed Payne?"

Barton answered listlessly and haltingly, glancing at Durand: "I knew him."

"When did you see him last?"

"I don't remember exactly. But—about —about twenty-five years ago."

"Where?"

"In Charleston."

"And you've never seen him since?"

"No."

"Tell us of your relations with Payne in Charleston."

"I just knew him."

"Were you friendly with him? Did you have business relations with him? Please be more specific."

"I just knew him."

Kenworthy referred to his papers.

"Isn't it a fact that you and Payne were rivals in love?"

Jimmy, who had been slipping into a leisurely attitude, sat up. So Brinze also had found the trail to Charleston! How many other trails had he found?

"Well—you might call it that."

"Thank you. And Payne was in love with the present Mrs. Barton?"

"Is it necessary to go into that?" interrupted Durand.

"It certainly is. Will you answer my question, please, Mr. Barton?"

"He liked her. Many young fellows liked her."

Mrs. Barton smiled sweetly.

"Liked her, did he? Wasn't he a pretty heavy suitor?"

"You might call it that."

"With your permission, I will call it that. And you, as it were, won her from him?"

"No," broke in Mrs. Barton. "From the minute I met my husband, there wasn't any other man."

"THERE was some sort of fight between you and Payne right after the marriage," said the district attorney, turning back to Barton. "Wasn't there?"

"How?"

Kenworthy read from a typewritten sheet an account of the shooting in the Charleston saloon. The wording of the statement convinced Jimmy that Ormet had told his story again for the benefit of Brinze or one of his agents.

"Is that substantially correct?" asked Kenworthy.

"Yes."

"Payne made statements to the effect that he would get you. He also said that he had something on you. What did he mean by that?"

"I decline to let my client answer that question," said Durand.

"That's a pity. Mr. Barton—when you were married, you were employed in a bank, were you not?"

"Yes."

"And setting up housekeeping was expensive?"

"You might say so."

"Yes. Well—you needed funds—that is, within the month after your marriage?"

"Yes."

Jimmy noted the deadening of Barton's voice and the tension of Mrs. Barton and Claire. He feared the next question.

"I'll ask Mr. Barton whether he didn't do a little speculating?"

A nod answered.

"And when the speculation went astray, didn't Payne come to the rescue?"

"Yes."

"Payne, as we learn, came to the rescue. He came to the rescue, in answer to an imploring letter. I have it here. It was in Payne's effects. Perhaps Mr. Barton can tell us the contents."

Barton bowed his head over his hands.

"This letter is one of a series of three, which Payne, for reasons of his own, kept in his safe. I shall now read them, and ask Mr. Barton to offer any comment he chooses."

Kenworthy took three envelopes from the desk.

"Number one. The post-mark is 1897, and it was written in Charleston.

> "DEAR PAYNE: For God's sake, help me out with three hundred dollars. If you do not, I shall be unable to make good this sum to the bank, and I cannot face the consequences of my folly. Anything I have or ever shall have is yours.

"Number two:

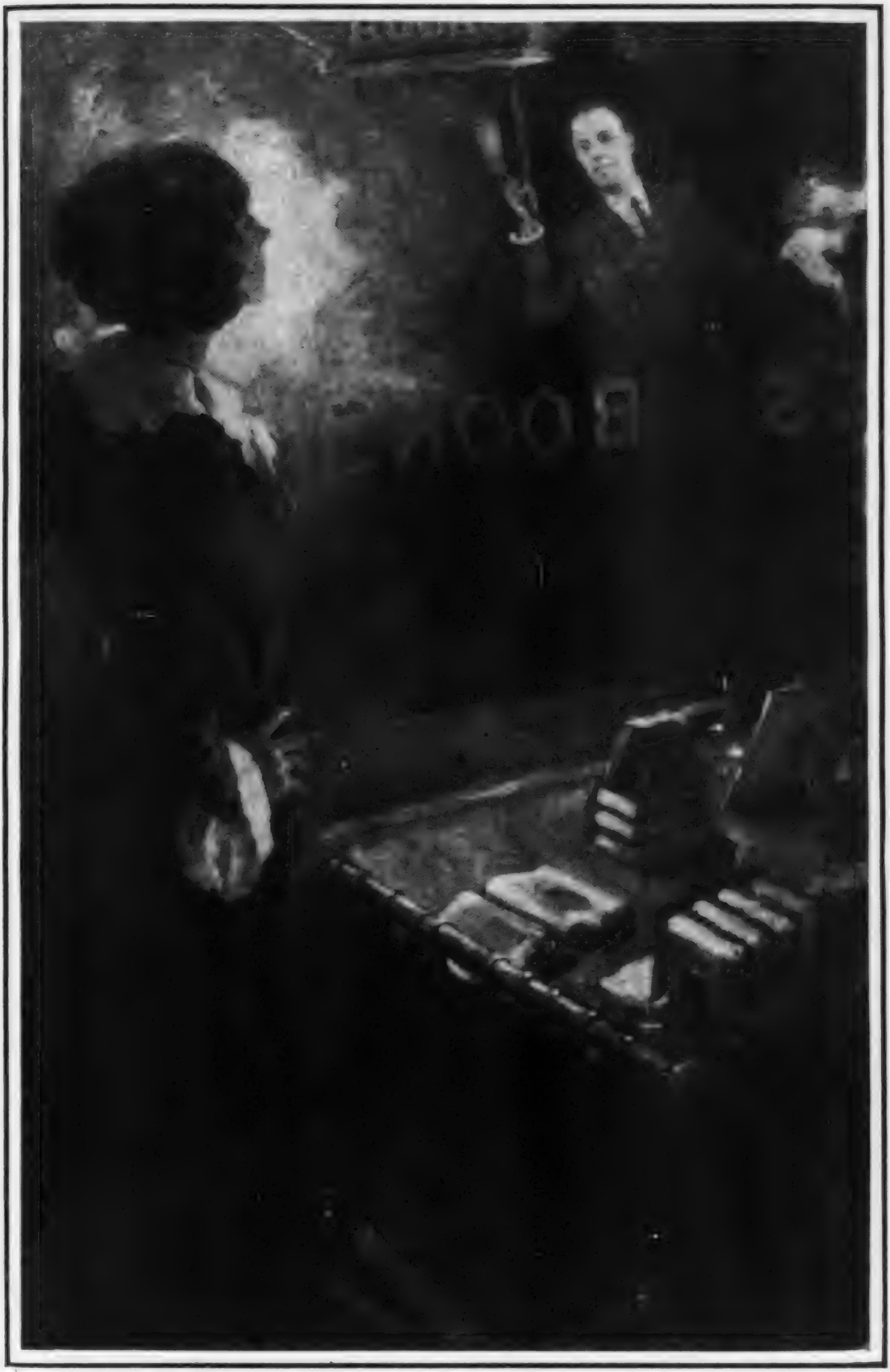
> "DEAR PAYNE: In God's name I beg you not to exact further payments from me. I have paid you over and over again for your accommodation in those early days, and I need every cent to keep my little business alive. Can you not have mercy on me?

"That was written in 1907. Number three was written ten years later. There is no salutation, but the address and the handwriting are sufficient to identify it.

> "I am giving up my business, for I can no longer pay tribute to you. I have nothing left in the world, and it is only the goodness of God that makes it possible for me to support my wife and little daughter. For their sake, I ask you to let me live in peace. I do not know what wrong I may have done you, but if my ruin and poverty will serve as your compensation, you have gained it."

Kenworthy replaced the letters.

"I read them, Mr. Durand," he remarked, with a mocking bow to Barton's attorney,



"Miss Quaid," said Jimmy, "I've brought some records I abstracted from your files. It was absent-minded of me to take them when I substituted for you."

"to prove that Mr. Barton had good reason for being none too kindly disposed toward Payne."

"They seem to prove," retorted Durand, "that Payne was a blackmailer."

"We're not trying Payne," snapped Kenworthy. "Somebody else seems to have taken that duty on himself, and that's why we're here this evening."

He stroked back his hair and ordered the pile of papers on his desk.

"Now I'll ask Mr. Brinze a few questions."

BRINZE buttoned his sport coat jauntily, and straightened out importantly. His answers were delivered crisply and with due regard for dramatic effect.

"You know a man named Hesbe—Blake Hesbe, do you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"This Hesbe is a broker, is he not?"

"In a small way. He handles no large accounts. He has no seat on the Exchange and he deals through larger houses for small customers."

"Very good. You have investigated him?"

"Thoroughly."

"He was, in a sense, a business agent for Payne?"

"Yes. Payne handled only big transactions, and referred small business to Hesbe."

"In the course of business, Hesbe became fairly familiar with Payne? They were friendly?"

"Yes."

"Who told you this?"

"Hesbe."

"Hesbe was also friendly with Miss Claire Barton?"

"Don't you think that you ought to ask Miss Barton that?" suggested Durand.

"Possibly, at the trial. You can put her on the stand then, if you care to. Now, Mr. Brinze, describe what you have discovered about the relations between Hesbe, Miss Barton and Payne."

"It was about like this. Hesbe, as I said, got Payne's chicken feed, and sometimes attended to little business matters for him. Payne accepted no commission on this business, although Hesbe says he offered to pay it. Instead, Payne would take it out in personal errands and things of that sort.

"Payne took a fancy to Miss Barton."

Claire's face turned red, and her mother tried to comfort her.

"Payne knew who she was, and wanted to meet her. Hesbe, having an office in the same building in which Miss Barton worked, was told to arrange a meeting. He managed to scrape up an acquaintance and so Payne got to know Miss Barton.

"I couldn't get from Hesbe whether Payne wanted to marry Miss Barton. Hesbe says he doesn't know. Anyhow, Miss Barton soon learned that Payne had some sort of hold on her father. She wouldn't go out with Payne, even when he threatened her.

"Payne told Hesbe that he was going to invite Miss Barton for a week-end. Hesbe told Miss Barton and induced her to invite him to go along—for her protection, as he said. He also told her that he knew about Payne's ideas, and that he would save her from him."

"Double-crossed Payne, in short," interpolated Durand.

"We're not passing on Hesbe's motives," announced Kenworthy.

"I suggest that Miss Barton tell her version of this matter," said Durand.

"Mr. Brinze's account seems adequate."

"I insist that Miss Barton check it up."

Kenworthy hesitated. "All right," he assented. "Of course, I'm not bound by anything she says here. Miss Barton, do you care to add your version of this affair to Mr. Brinze's?"

CLAIRE stood up. Jimmy saw that she was summoning all her forces to speak coherently and to avert a collapse.

"Mr. Brinze's story is substantially correct—that part of it which concerns me," she said in a voice that was beautiful for all its restrained agitation. "Mr. Hesbe made my acquaintance, introduced me to Mr. Payne, and then made use of his knowledge of my father's misfortunes to thrust his company on me. I might add that in a minor way he forced silence on me. He forbade me to discuss in any way his relations with me on pain of giving up his efforts with Payne in behalf of my father. What these efforts may have been, I don't know.

"He even went so far as to intimate to people that we were to be married. When I protested, he said that we could discuss the matter later, but that I must give the impression of being his fiancée in order that he might complete his schemes to release my father. I see now that that was all false."

Jimmy almost cheered. His pleasure was so evident that Durand cautioned him not to show too much feeling.

"Mr. Payne called me to his office one day, and invited me for a week-end at Bellechester. I declined, but he said that no harm would come to me and threatened something very unpleasant to my father if I wouldn't come. I knew then that my father was no longer answerable for—for anything that had happened twenty-five years ago, but I knew that any publicity would break his heart and perhaps kill him. What else could I do?"

"You told your father?" asked Kenworthy.

"I didn't intend to, but he insisted on knowing where I was going for the week-end, and I told him the truth."

"That's more than satisfactory," remarked Kenworthy. "That's all for the present, Miss Barton."

He turned suddenly to Barton.

"Where were you on the night that Payne died, Mr. Barton?" he shouted.

Barton hardly raised his head.

"Nowhere in particular."

"You were somewhere, and somewhere in particular. You know where you were, and there's no use evading the question."

"He doesn't have to answer," objected Durand.

"I say he does! Were you at home that night, Mr. Barton?"

No answer.

Kenworthy shifted to Mrs. Barton.

"Was your husband home on the night to which I refer?"

Mrs. Barton, completely taken aback, mumbled a soft negative.

"Where were you then, Mr. Barton? Answer me!"

No answer.

"All right."

Kenworthy pushed a buzzer on the desk, and Constable Rooks entered.

"Bring in Hatch," snapped Kenworthy.

ROOKS returned in a moment, with a homely, heavy-set man of middle age.

"Mr. Hatch," said Kenworthy, "you were the clerk on duty at the Coliseum Hotel here on the night on which Lee Payne died?"

"Yes, sir."

"There were not many visitors?"

"No, sir—not for that time of year."

"You could identify any of the guests who registered while you were on duty?"

"Certainly."

"Very good. Look at this man here and tell me whether he stopped at the hotel that night."

Hatch squinted at Barton.

"Yes, sir."

"Do you recall under what name he registered?"

"Yes, sir. Mr. Brown of New York."

"That's all, Mr. Hatch. You may go."

As Hatch retired, Kenworthy turned triumphantly to Barton.

"Naturally, we looked up all the strangers in town after the shooting, Mr. Barton. We identified all except a mysterious Mr. Brown of New York. But Mr. Hatch described the unknown Mr. Brown so accurately that we knew where to find him if we needed him. Do you deny that you were registered at the Coliseum Hotel on that night under the name of Brown?"

"No," moaned Barton. "My God, I only came out here so I could be on the ground if anything happened to Claire. I didn't know what Payne was up to. I wanted to be here to protect my daughter—that was all."

"That was enough. Mr. Durand, is there anything you want to say?"

Jimmy pulled Durand's sleeve.

"You keep out of this!" shouted Brinze. "You know what we'll do to you if you butt in again!"

"I have a right to consult with my—secretary," said Durand blandly. "So far you've shown nothing to indicate that my client was in any way connected with the death of Payne."

"We don't have to tell you everything," retorted Kenworthy, "and we have enough evidence to hold him."

"It's late now," demurred Durand, "and there are a few bits of evidence I want to lay before you. May we continue this in the morning? You can see for yourself that my client is in no condition to answer further questions now."

"As a courtesy to you, I'll defer action until ten o'clock tomorrow morning. But

I may as well tell you that we've only touched the evidence in our possession."

"There's the gun—" Brinze started grandly.

"Shut up, you fool!" barked Kenworthy.

Again he pressed the buzzer for Rooks.

"We'll hold this man overnight," the district attorney ordered, "as—well, as a material witness."

Jimmy looked for a tearful scene, but Barton meekly followed the constable, without looking at his family. Claire and Mrs. Barton were huddled together, paying little attention to the soothing words of Durand. Kenworthy locked his papers in the desk, took his hat from the rack and started for the door with Brinze.

"Pardon me," said Jimmy. "May I look at your New York telephone book?"

With a grunt, Brinze flung it at him.

"Good night!" jeered the detective. "Maybe you'll find the murderer's name in it."

Jimmy opened the book at the H's, and ran his finger down a row of names. Then he wrote a few lines on a slip of paper.

"I don't care how you do it," he told Durand, "but get this man here at ten tomorrow. That's the address."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the lawyer.

"Do it!" insisted Jimmy, striding quickly from the room. "I've got to telephone to New York."

THERE was one addition to the melancholy gathering chaperoned by Durand in Brinze's office the next morning. He was Dr. Villmers, and his brooding calm seemed to soothe the worn nerves of the Bartons. Jimmy was at high tension, but only the brightness of his eyes indicated his mental state. Dr. Villmers had brought with him a sort of restfulness.

"Good morning!" said Kenworthy briskly.

Durand arose. "This is no time to enter an official plea," he said, "but in the interest of law and justice, I wish to present a few considerations to Mr. Kenworthy. I therefore turn over the statement of these facts to Mr. Wrome here."

"We know Mr. Wrome," said Brinze. "We've heard some of his notions. Is there any good reason, Mr. Durand, why we should hear more of them?"

"I prefer to let Mr. Wrome speak," answered Durand stiffly. "Go ahead, Mr. Wrome."

Kenworthy and Brinze exchanged more or less skilful winks, as Jimmy unlocked his little strong box and arranged the contents on a small table.

"What's that mustache for?" inquired Brinze. "Going to a masquerade?"

"Masquerade?" repeated Jimmy after him. "Something like that."

He sat down, folded his hands, and spoke quietly.

"To begin with," he said, "I'm rather a nervous man. Dr. Villmers here, whom you may have heard of as a neurologist, will be glad to testify to that. I may add that we didn't make so great an inroad on his valuable time merely to prove that my nerves sometimes go awry.

"Some time ago, my affections were involved deeply for the first time."

"Is this a love story?" interrupted Brinze. "I thought you were going to tell us who killed Payne."

"'Chairchez le femm,' to quote your classical French," Jimmy went on smoothly. "But we must wait for our femm. As a result of this entanglement, my nerves were upset and I consulted a physician. He advised me to read detective stories to divert my mind and interests. Dr. Villmers will tell you that the adoption of this curious habit in the frame of mind in which I then was resulted in an obsession. That means that I saw life in terms of detective stories."

"You still do," observed Brinze.

"Fortunately, yes. When Dr. Farrigan invited me to go to Olean with him, I naturally saw the whole scene as the background for a mystery. It was all like the books I had read. Even Payne looked like a character. When I went to Shuffle Inn that night, my mind was full of the possibilities of the situation. The banker ill at home, while his guests were making merry only a little way off. And when I heard Dr. Farrigan paged, I couldn't resist the impulse to—well, to butt in.

"You know what I found when I hurried back to Olean. If the darkened room, the mysterious manner of Stelke, the butler, and the grave tones of the doctor weren't typical properties of a mystery story, I didn't know my mystery stories. Of course, I had to be the last to learn of the event. Throughout this case, I seem to have come upon the scene after every one else has been over it."

"And here you are again," chirped Brinze.

"This time I'm not so certain that I'm late. My first thought naturally was, 'Did Payne really shoot himself?' Why should he commit suicide? Wasn't it more likely that some enemy had squared an old grudge? I managed to look over the ground, and I found that there was no doubt that Payne had fired the shot that ended his life.

"But—it was not suicide. Payne was murdered. He was murdered by some one who was several miles away at the time of the shooting, and the actual murder took place about five or six hours before the shot was fired."

Kenworthy stirred in his chair.

"This is all most diverting," he remarked coldly, "but we're trying to get at facts."

"You're getting at them. The manner in which the murder was committed flashed into my mind instantly. I also thought that I knew who did it. My suspicion was incorrect, but in my enthusiasm I blurted out a few generalities to a reporter. I can prove how the murder was done, and the facts do not vary in the slightest from my original hypothesis. The identity of the murderer, however, may be a little surprising.

"YOU will recall the initialed revolver and the note which Payne left. I thought it curious that the revolver should be there so opportunely. In fact, I was sure that it had been left there by some one who wanted Payne to use it just as he did and who had had it initialed to make it seem natural. I traced the revolver—by a somewhat different method than that which Mr. Brinze used, but with the same results. You are right, Mr. Brinze. It was purchased by Monica Wells, but I am a little surprised that the name doesn't mean more to you."

"Miss Barton bought it under that name," snapped Brinze. "That's old stuff."

"Granted. But the fact that she used that name was very helpful to me, at least. The note also was interesting. You may have heard that there was a story-telling bee at Olean during the storm. Some one told the story of a suicide, and this story tallied almost exactly with Payne's end. In this story, a man retired, woke up at midnight, wrote a note saying he would end it all, and shot himself. That's what Payne did. But the wording of the note he left was that of the suicide in the story. The paper also was significant. It was unlike any stationery in the house. The top had been torn off to conceal its origin. In short, this scrap of paper had been planted on the desk, so that Payne would not have to search for paper, and so that he could attend to his shooting with as little delay as possible. All very thoughtful, you will agree."

Kenworthy was looking at Jimmy seriously.

"Go on," he said crisply, as Jimmy paused.

"On the basis of this, and my hypothesis, I tried to run down the murderer. And now I'll tell you what that hypothesis was.

"Payne was killed by autosuggestion. Everybody knows what that is. An idea takes possession of what we call the subconscious mind. We are hardly aware that it is present. But at some moment, when the psychological safeguard known as the 'censor' isn't aware of it, this subconscious idea takes possession of the conscious mind and, under favorable conditions, results in action. Payne had been given the suggestion to kill himself in just the manner that he did, and arising sleepily, weakly, and also feeling ill, he acted on it. Even the waking was part of the suggestion."

"Hold on," interrupted the district attorney. "Who told that story about the suicide?"

"I thought you'd ask that," remarked Jimmy. "It was Mr. Hesbe."

"So you accuse—"

"I don't accuse any one yet. You've jumped to a conclusion."

Jimmy held up the false mustache.

"Not long after it became known to some people that I was working on this case, I found that I was under strict surveillance. Some one had been kind enough to engage a lank, seedy shifter to follow me. I say that this unique shadow was acting for a principal because it's unthinkable that he would operate on his own initiative. Furthermore, a principal wouldn't be likely to take the risks involved in that sort of enterprise. The fake mustachio here belonged to the shadow. He and I had a little catch-as-catch-can encounter one day, and I won by a hair, so to speak.

"NOW this shadow was rather an annoyance. He seemed to have no office hours, and I couldn't count on him. He also was addicted to singing, and his favorite song seemed to be a melody which had particularly poignant associations for me. By the way, Mr. Brinze, on the night that you provided me with the questionable hospitality of your jail, the shadow serenaded me from the yard. He certainly knew what was going on. He also is the worst singer I ever heard."

"Is this musical criticism?" asked Brinze.

"No—but remember the song. It's important."

Jimmy looked at his watch.

"I've timed this very nicely, I think. The train ought to be in now, and if the detective Mr. Durand recommended still has the shadow with him, I'll introduce you to the gentleman in a few minutes. While we wait, let me say that the shadow really proved a very handy thing for me."

"This is all very good, I suppose," said Kenworthy, "but what bearing has it on the revolver?"

Jimmy fetched out his copy of "The Porterhouse Murder."

"Here is a most engaging tale," he said. "The heroine's name is Monica Wells. That was why I was a little startled by Miss Barton's alias. I'll tell you more about the book later.

"About this shadow, now. He seems to have left threatening letters in my room. Here are two. One is a crudely typed warning. Another appeared under the mattress, following a shooting in my room while I was away. It informs me that the next time, my head, not the pillow, will be punctured. This note is in writing. And here is a third exhibit. It's a receipt. I got it in Mr. Hesbe's office the day that I followed you there, Mr. Brinze."

Here Rooks ushered in Durand's detective, who brought with him Hesbe and his assistant.

"Here's Mr. Hesbe," said Jimmy, "and his office helper, who has taken the trouble to follow me so closely. The similarity of the writing on the notes I've offered seems to me to be conclusive. The paper also is the same."

The shadow was trembling.

"Sit down," said Jimmy. "We've met before."

"What's all this about?" blustered Hesbe.

"Does this man work for you?" inquired Jimmy.

"He does."

"That's interesting—but don't jump to a conclusion, Mr. Kenworthy."

"I want to question that man," said Kenworthy.

"Please let me go on. I want to take up a point about Payne. He was a man who worked on hunches. He was extremely susceptible to suggestion. In his weakened condition, the suicide suggestion worked beautifully. Now I must connect this suggestion with motives."

"We showed Barton's motive yesterday," said Kenworthy. "If he's your murderer, I'll waive the rest of your story."

"He's no more the murderer than you are, or even Mr. Brinze."

Brinze looked away indignantly.

"Mr. Barton had plenty of motive, I'll admit," Jimmy continued, "and if he had done it nobody could have blamed him, and not a jury in the world would have convicted him. But that's neither here nor there.

"Following up every clue I could find, I found several possibilities. One trail led to Miss Barton, despite her alibi. I apologize to her for ever having even considered her in the matter. And I don't mind saying that if I had found undeniable evidence against her, I would have kept it to myself.

"Another led to Mr. Gulvin. That was a fairly obvious thing, as I believe I proved to Mr. Brinze on one occasion.

"A third took me to Mr. Hesbe. Frankly, I should have enjoyed that, for reasons which no longer obtain—again I apologize to Miss Barton, but only she will understand this. But Mr. Hesbe isn't implicated. Of course, he told the story which served as the suggestion, but he didn't know what he was doing, and his only motive was to be entertaining and cheerful.

"THEN I recalled that the person back of the murder and back of the shadowing which I underwent must be some one who had in his hands a complete knowledge not only of Payne, but of me. And there was only one person who had that.

"That person, I regret to say, was Dr. Hugh Farrigan."

"Where is he?" shouted Kenworthy, jumping to his feet.

"I yield the floor to Dr. Villmers," said Jimmy.

The neurologist leaned back wearily in his chair.

"This is very painful for me," he said, "and yet I must tell what I know.

"Dr. Farrigan came to our hospital, of which I am one of the directors, as a young physician of great promise. We thought that he would develop into a really great orthopedist. But he made little progress. He had in him a curious experimental streak. He was reprimanded several times for unjustifiable experiments on clinical patients. I made a study of him and discovered that it was a curious kink in his mind that led him to these excesses. He looked like a sturdy, dependable young practitioner. Very often, he performed brilliant operations. But every now and then something morbid in his make-up would lead him into dangerous ways. When we learned that he had made unsound experiments in autosuggestion, we considered seriously the question of dismissing him from our staff.

"I am more than a little worn this morning, for I have been with Dr. Farrigan all night. I have here his own statement. He had become interested in the idea of inducing suicide by autosuggestion by a book—"

"Here it is," interrupted Jimmy, tossing "The Porterhouse Murder" to Kenworthy. "It's all in that story. And here are library cards to prove that he borrowed it from a circulating library. This is the copy he borrowed, and he marked some most illuminating passages with a pencil. You can read them for yourself. He even told Miss Barton to use the name 'Monica Wells' when she bought the pistol. You see, it's all detective-story stuff. Only, it happens that I had read the right detective story."

"Just a moment, Mr. Wrome," said Dr. Villmers. "That explains your procedure. Dr. Farrigan's confession is very complete. It tells how he conceived the idea, how he coerced Miss Barton to place the pistol and the paper in Payne's room—"

"Did you know that, Wrome?" broke in Kenworthy.

"Sure," said Jimmy. "And it certainly was rough on my nerves. Only, I didn't know that Farrigan knew about Mr. Barton's relations with Payne. And Miss Barton, at one time, didn't care to favor me with information. Perhaps it was because three men were holding things over her, and she didn't want a fourth."

"DR. FARRIGAN'S first intention was not to kill Mr. Payne," continued the neurologist. "He didn't believe suggestion would go that far. But he had a fiendish notion about trying the experiment and learning Payne's reactions on finding the pistol and paper. Mr. Hesbe played into his hands with that story. As Dr. Farrigan led Payne upstairs he all but hypnotized him—he has amazingly compelling eyes—into following the suggestion. If Hesbe hadn't told the story, he would merely have given Payne a mild suggestion before retiring and awaited results. But all that is in the confession.

"When Dr. Farrigan learned of Mr. Wrome's activities, he became frightened, and tried to drive him from his purpose by playing on his nerves. It was clever of him to engage Mr. Hesbe's office assistant for the purpose. You see, Mr. Wrome, you told Dr. Farrigan that you would like to 'hang it on Hesbe,' and he proposed to lead you in that direction if he couldn't frighten you off altogether. May I ask, as a matter of interest, whether you had him under suspicion the night you stayed at his rooms?"

"I had him spotted ever since I heard so much of that melody," said Jimmy. "He was the only person I'd told about it until I told you last night. He played into my hands by referring me to you. But he thought I was consulting you about myself. That's where he slipped."

"And of course you see," concluded the neurologist, "why he insisted throughout that it was suicide."

Kenworthy took Farrigan's confession from Dr. Villmers.

"Where's Farrigan now?" he asked.

"After I called on him and told him what Mr. Wrome had told me, he collapsed. He's a complete wreck. I doubt whether he'll ever recover completely. I have had him committed to our neurological ward. It is not for me to interfere, but is it necessary to prosecute this unfortunate young man, who is, in a way, a mental cripple?

From what I have learned of this case, it seems to me that the state would be performing no divine act of justice by persecuting the slayer of a man like Payne."

Kenworthy tore up some papers.

"Barton is released," he snapped. "I want Farrigan."

"Listen, Mr. Kenworthy," said Jimmy. "You couldn't convict him. First of all, it would be too easy to prove that he was mentally incompetent. Second, this form of murder isn't so easy to use as a basis for a good conviction. Think it over."

"Here's his confession," insisted Kenworthy.

"What of it?"

"You know what the papers have been doing to us ever since you broke into print. How can we back down now?"

Jimmy walked over to Claire and took her hand.

"Let me do the backing down," he said. "I'm out of the detective business now, and, after all, it *was* a suicide. I'll give Heidelman a perfectly stunning retraction. It won't bother me much, because I expect to be out of town."

THERE was a light mist along upper Broadway, as Myrna Quaid decided that it was time for Mecklin's to close for the night. She looked from the door to the corner and was confirmed in her decision by the sight of a familiar figure standing under an awning at the orangeade stand on the corner. A pleasant young man, wearing a light brown suit and smoking a cigarette was looking at his watch. He rubbed the mist from his shell-rimmed glasses, and shook his head with a smile.

It was a pity to keep him waiting. In a way, it served him right, for he really should have called for her at the shop and waited until she was ready to go. But he was shy, and she liked him for it.

As she was putting on a charming new summer hat, and taking her umbrella from the stand, two persons entered. She looked about, a little aggrieved, for she had already delayed her meeting too long; but she smiled amiably as she saw Jimmy and the lovely young woman who accompanied him, arm in arm.

"Well, Miss Quaid," said Jimmy, "here is Miss Barton. Miss Barton is to become a regular patron of your establishment within the next few weeks."

"I'm happy to meet Miss Barton," answered the librarian.

"Here, by the way, are some records I abstracted from your files," said Jimmy, handing her two cards. "It was absentminded of me to take them when I substituted for you."

"And absent-minded to leave copies?"

Jimmy was embarrassed.

"You're a curious man, Mr. Wrome," continued Miss Quaid. "I half suspect you of many things. Your card is full of detective stories—far more than the doctor ordered. Are you learning a new profession?"

"No," said Claire, "Mr. Wrome is going back to his old job. But you're right. He's a very curious man."

"Is any additional deposit required when two members of the same family draw books?" asked Jimmy.

"Not for your family," returned Miss Quaid.

"Well, Mrs. Wrome will draw some when we return. And I know that you'll give her the same charming service that you gave to her husband."

"Certainly."

Miss Quaid shook hands with them heartily as they passed out of the door into the mists. She looked up Broadway until Jimmy's bright hatband and Claire's twinkling ankles had disappeared in the night.

She patted the rows of books into symmetry and carefully locked the desk. With a faint smile she opened it again and dropped Jimmy's cards into their proper places. She pulled down the shade and, looking around once more at her neat little institution, set the lock on the door, and switched off the lights. Mecklin's was closed until nine o'clock the next morning.

As she stepped out of the door, she looked again to the corner. The young man was still there, still looking amiable, still waiting. She felt a little guilty about keeping him standing there so long. But he would understand. He was charming, she thought, and above all sympathetic. Yes, she reflected, he was a delightful person.

She closed the door and started down the street to keep her somewhat deferred appointment with the author of this book.

THE END

Everybody's Chimney Corner

Where Reader, Author and Editor Gather to Talk Things Over

FROM selling sandwiches to effete Easterners on S. P. through trains that stopped at Albany, Oregon, to writing short stories for magazines, Charles Alexander ("Major of Lamontai," page 122) has led a life of varied interests. He writes:

At the age of twelve I learned to spot a New Englander by the fact that he always opened the sandwich and considered the shred of ham therein. A New Englander also can tell whether coffee has cream or grease in it by peering at the floating specks of oil. I shall perhaps never visit New England. The dimes I thus made I spent for bird books, animal books, books on geology, religion, spiritualism, history and literature. I imagine I was the youngest creature taking the *Auk*, a quarterly read only by ornithologists, and the *Open Court*, a heavy philosophical journal; they cost me a pretty number of dimes; I could not understand them, which was perhaps why they fascinated me.

In turn I made collections of bugs, mounted animals, birds, fossils and books, determining at different periods to become a second Finley, Carus, Hornaday or Darwin—but never a writer. Considering my education completed at twelve, I set out on my career forthwith, becoming a printer's devil at a dollar a week and then a linotype operator. Chinese pheasants intrigued me; from sixteen to twenty-two I built up a pheasant farm which supplied in its peak year 8,000 eggs and 2,000 pheasants to eastern state game commissions. And I worked as reporter, editor, and finally launched the *Sunday Democrat*, a little paper which still runs; and I remember that big boy, Peter Clark Macfarlane, said it was the only sheet of its kind in the country, a statement to be taken several ways.

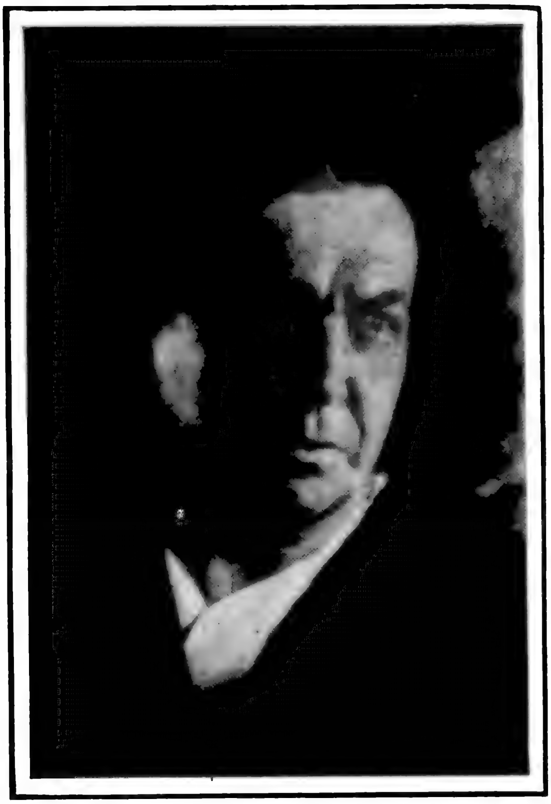
ALL along, my Scotch father had impressed on me that anything one did in this world had its reward; the commercial view was taught me and I looked into bugs, birds and mountains, always searching for a profession therein for me. I didn't know it was their sheer beauty that got me; I thought it was the possibility of making money out of them. I slowly learned the truth. Slowly I drifted to fiction, vowing that I would not try to write because it was clear that no one ever made any money out of it. In spite of these vows I stayed up nights writing. Five years I put in fighting not to write and writing and fighting the editors at the same time. It was ruining me—my farm I let go to pieces—and I hope it ruined an editor or two. One magazine, after taking my first two yarns, suspended publication, as did another, a Greenwich Village magazine, which took the third.

I had never written an animal story; I wrote one; a magazine took it, did not suspend, and asked for more. They took the next twelve. So for three years I've been selling.

CERTAINLY J. H. Greene ("The Flagellant of Farthing Rock," page 85) has learned from personal experience what that moody old man, the North Atlantic, can do when he gets down to business and stages a "shiver-my-timbers" storm. Mr. Greene's Chimney Corner talk makes clear this point.

I am a native of Australia [he writes] and was born in Melbourne. As a member of Einstein I ignore the reality of the years. I am more American than Anzac if time can be considered. I got my introduction to print in the columns of the Sydney *Bulletin*. I contributed verse and short stories to that paper under the editorship of Mr. J. P. Archibald. That gentleman taught all his writers by ridiculing us weekly in his correspondence column and we had to bend our knees to De Maupassant. Then I turned actor and went barnstorming over the back blocks of the bush territory. I also went prospecting to the West Australia gold fields. Then I came to America after a few weeks in London acting in vaudeville round the music halls. I have done everything in the American theater from Chautauqua to Broadway. I was the original Ham Peggotty in Liebler's version of "David Copperfield," at Wallack's. During the war, while playing in "The Tailor-Made Man" at the Cohan and Harris Theatre, I started writing war stories. They led to others and I came up to Provincetown to see if I could maintain a steady output. I have spent three winters here with the storms shaking my shack and the surf under my windows. But the winter bathing is not as cold as Broadway when you are out of a job, and correspondence with editors

Charles Alexander ("Major of Lamontai," page 122) evinced his philosophical outlook on life even at twelve as a train butcher.



J. H. Greene ("The Flagellant of Farthing Rock, page 85) is a Jack-of-many-trades: journalism, prospecting, acting and magazine writing.

is less harassing than interviews with managers—even when schooled by Equity.

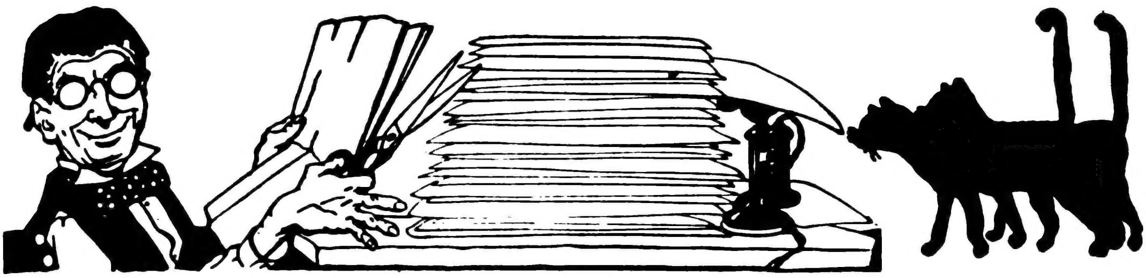
LAST spring there appeared in EVERYBODY'S Beale Davis's first novel, "One-Way Street." Our private opinion that it was a corking story was confirmed by several readers who were kind enough to write to us. To quote from one of them:

> I read "One-Way Street," by Beale Davis. Aside from the persistent use of prepositional endings (which I at times would *like* to use if I had nerve enough) his language reads without a jar; it is pleasing, easily read, and one does not need to rack his brains to follow the ideas sought to be expressed. He handles his situation superbly not an episode too few or too many. His grasp of human nature is remarkable. I know nothing about the locale of his plot but his story reads as if he had been there. If this is his first novel, his place in American literature will be secure if he keeps at it.

Mr. Davis's second novel, "The Goat Without Horns" (page 29, this issue), should confirm the enthusiastic tone of the letter. Here the author writes with startling conviction of an altogether different locale, exposing the workings of the voodoo mind with a clarity that can be described as nothing short of getting down to brass tacks.

WHEN an editor turns author you may be sure that he has something new to say. John Farrar, editor of the *Bookman*, comes to EVERYBODY'S with the story of a girl's problem, "The Greatest Lover" (page 152). He writes:

> Surely, life is, at best, a most uneventful thing. I have spent too much of mine reading. At eight, in spite of protests, I launched into Shakespeare. At ten I began writing, at fifteen I busily turned out horrible five-act verse dramas, one of which was called "Firewater" and was a temperance play. Presently I became a bellboy and read on the bench. At college (Yale) I read when I wasn't writing or running. During the war my job was reading. For a brief and thoroughly happy time I worked with J. O'H. Cosgrave on the Sunday *World* and didn't read at all, enjoying reporting as I've never enjoyed anything before or since. At that time it looked as though I might escape being a bookworm, but presently I became editor of the *Bookman* and my fate was sealed. Of the things I am most proud in life is the fact that a bank robber once offered me a position as his partner in crime. This helps me to believe that maybe I'm not such a bookworm as I think. My favorite sport is swimming. I always wear a black tie or mean to do so. The theater is my passion and when I'm not ambitious to be a playwright, I have a sneaking desire to act. Outwardly, I appear as calm as calm can be but inwardly I'm convinced that I'm an adventurer. This is the first short story published over my own name, but I'm going to write as many more as I can



Prose *and* Worse, *by* Gridley Adams

DO YOU BELIEVE IN SIGNS?

In Ellington, Conn.: "*Miss Emerald Green.*" (MRS. R. F B.)
In Minneapolis: "*Dr. Stinger, Chiropractor.*" (MISS M. A. A.)
In Buffalo: "*Dr. Storck.*" (J. M., JR.)
In Fort Collins, Colo.: "*Dr. Quick.*" "*Steakbake, the Butcher.*" (MISS M. M. G.)
On East 9th Street, Los Angeles: "*Beware of the Dog in the Rear.*" (I'll say so! That's where one met me once.) (MISS K. E. R.)
In Hartford, Conn.: "*Miss Lucy Tooth.*" (MRS. R. F. B.)
(She had better go to Doc Liftig, same city.)

(Pendleton, Ky., Reformer)

Attendance at Sunday School Sunday, 70; collection, $1.66 with large congregation at each preaching service. At the morning service Mrs. Hugh Vater presented herself baptism.

In other words, she *fell* in the tank.

(Vincennes paper)

A. W. Bey, the well-known grocer of North Vincennes, and who is the democratic nominee for trustee of Vincennes township, was presented with a bouncing baby girl this morning by Mrs. Bey.

Extraordinary, and also remarkable.

(Creston, Iowa, Advertiser-Gazette)

His accompaniments were played by Madam Myron Smith, and the fine rich voice of Mrs. Hollenbeck together with the beautifully furnished and decorated rooms, made the guests feel as if they were in a much larger city than Creston.

Completely carried away, as 'twere.

(St. Joseph Gazette)

Besides these, the detectives found two half dollars which only a little while before had been removed from the mold. When taken to Central police station the two would have nothing to say.

Proving that silence is not always golden.

(Springfield Republican Weather Forecast)

"Thunder Showers this morning followed by rain."

Proving the old adage that "it never rains but it pours."

(Letter from a Kansas City concern)

Dear Sir: Mr. Louie Osterhag, our traveling representative, is now in your state. He has with him sample legs, and is himself wearing an artificial leg, which embody the very latest and best improvements. We desire one of our latest legs in your neighborhood. Our usual guarantee stands behind each leg. Yours very truly, etc.

Aren't you glad you lived when even wooden legs were a treat?

(Amsterdam, N. Y., Recorder-Democrat)

The strangers, two bull heifers, sauntered unaccompanied down East Main street.

Some more of that Luther Burbank's work.

(Sign on 46th Street, New York)

Eaves Costume Company.

The chorus will now sing the old familiar song "When the Leaves Begin to Fall."

(Chicago Tribune)

The marriage is announced of Miss Anne Susen to Joseph S. Pliska, which took place on Saturday. Mr. Pliska was in the air service during the war. He is the only man who ever flew a plane under the bridge at Niagara Falls.

Well, from now on he'll be up in the air most of the time, I'll tell you *that!*

(Clinton, Okla., Chronicle)

Miss Opal Sights, who is attending the university at Norman, is home for the holidays.

"Drink to me only with thine eyes."

Copyright, 1925, by Gridley Adams.

(Pendleton, Ky., Reformer)

Adam Schnor and wife spent Sunday with her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Will Spaulding and family.

If he's as bad as that, I'll bet nobody slept a wink.

(Clinton Chronicle)

Earl Bledsoe is hereby notified that he has been sued by Barcil Bledsoe, in the District Court of Custer County, Oklahama, for a divorce, and that he must, etc.

Two hearts that once bledsoe as one.

(Havana, Ill., Democrat)

The R. N. A. held a masquerade social at their lodge rooms Thursday night. Some twenty ladies wore masks and a merry time was had.

Where were the police?

(From letter of a man hotelling at Hot Springs)

"My wife got here two weeks ago, and we have had only one day of sunshine since."

That was when she had such a cold she couldn't talk.

(Custer City Courier)

LOST—Tug, short tug and belly-band, between home and George Morse's place. Carl DeSpain.

Well, so long as he didn't lose his suspenders he was in luck.

(Utica, N. Y., Observer-Dispatch)

FLORENCE L. FAKE Beauty Parlors—Marcelling a specialty. McLaughlin Bldg.

(E. E. V.)

Gee, she admits it!

(Shattuck, Okla., Shiftings)

W. B. Pine, nominee on the Republican ticket for United States Senate, spoke to a large and appreciative audience Tuesday night. Mr. Pine is a very forceful speaker and the infoamation he gave to the public was far reaching.

It sprayed me, and I was sitting away back in the last row.

(Breezy Stories)

In a spasm of berserk rage she sprang to her feet.

(MRS. S. B. R.)

They muster been beauts.

(Hyde Park, N. Y., items)

George Aird of the Vanderbilt estate had the misfortune to strain his neck while out riding recently.

Yes, I caught a glimpse of her, too, but friend wife was with me and I didn't dare turn my head.

(Darrouzett, Okla., Digest)

The cattlemen of Darrouzett shipped out six cars of cattle Saturday. Among those shipped were William Erts, Fred Faucett, Herman Botman and Henry Frass.

They surely will be missed from our midst.

(Glenville, W. Va., Democrat)

Mr. Paul Kidd polished up the family Buick and headed her South Saturday evening. It was later seen parked close up to a private residence in Burnsville.

All the earmarks of a very nasty crack.

(Sign in Hartford, Conn.)

Hazard Auto Repair Shop.

Who'll take the first chance?

(Rock City, N. Y.)

In the garden at Orchard Grove Farm House the "sass" has a tendency to grow notwithstanding the cool weather. Beans and onions are especially uncommonly pert.

Yes, and one young potato got real fresh, and winked one of his "eyes" at me when I passed.

(Darrouzett, Okla., News)

Martina Northrup, Erma Davis and Amelia Meier, students at the Normal at Alva, are the guests of Ima Stout.

Huh, I'm a perfect 44 myself.

(New York Sun)

She is sailing to see her son by a previous marriage, Robin Thomas, 10 years old, who is in school in France, and her daughter, Diana, 3½ years old, in an English school.

Daughter, meet your loving mother.

(Phila. Bulletin)

FOR SALE—Aquariums, 3 large fish. Call Coal Office, Jasper & Lehigh Av. (J. T., JR.)

Black Bass?

(Mexico, Mo., Ledger)

A large tree fell on Miss Barber Johnson, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. J. R. Johnson, but escaped serious injury. (MISS A. L.)

Evidently missed her head.

(New York Sun)

Exclusive
STOUT APPAREL
Exclusively.

Takes up so much space they haven't room for smaller sizes.

Everybody's Chestnut Tree

***Editor's Note:** Though the sign is the Chestnut Tree, no story is barred by its youth. We will gladly pay for available ones. Address all manuscripts to "The Chestnut Tree," enclosing stamped addressed envelope.*

"I SEE," remarked Farmer Jessup to his neighbor, "that they've jest passed a law agin Canady thistles."

"Wal, now, ain't that lucky?" said the latter. "I was wonderin' yesterday how I was goin' to get rid of that patch of mine."

MOTHER had been reading a Bible story to Marjory every night before bedtime. One night she asked, "Well, Marjory, what story shall I read tonight?"

"Oh, mother," Marjory answered, "I want you to read me that one about the ten girls who went out to meet the bridegroom and ran out of gasoline!"

FREDERICK was crying, when Billy came along and asked what was the matter.

"Oh, I feel so bad 'cause Collie's dead!" sobbed Frederick.

"Shucks!" said Billy. "My grandmother's been dead a week and you don't catch me crying."

Frederick gave his eyes and nose a swipe and, looking up, sobbed despairingly:

"Yes, but you didn't raise your grandmother from a pup."

PAT and Mike were having a fist fight. Pat was landing every blow he aimed upon Mike's anatomy. Mike's friend Bill stood by, an interested onlooker. Finally he shouted:

"Mike! For the love of Pete, and can't yez stop iny of thim?"

Mike blurted back: "An do yes say iny of thim goin' by?"

"IT'S so hard to find what you want when you're shopping."

"Isn't it, though? Especially if you don't know what you want."

"THE verra best music I ever heard whateffer," remarked one of the pipers at a Bobby Burns night, "was doon at Jamie Maclaughlan's. There was fifteen o' us in Jamie's wee back parlor, all playin' different chunes. I thocht I was floatin' aboot in heaven."

BIG DAVE HOLLY, from way back in the Smokies, had held a job in a distant lumber town long enough to pick up a few choice bits of slang, which were a welcome addition to his scanty vocabulary. Soon afterward he fell under "conviction" in a mountain revival, and after several nights of bodily and spiritual struggle finally "came through." Leaping to his feet he began shouting: "Glory Halleluyer! Praise the Lord! I'm a saved sinner—*hot dawg*."

GUY: Would you marry the man who loves you or one who could give you a town and a country house, a car, and jewels?

GIRL: Well, love is desirable, but those other things you mentioned are absolute necessities.

FIRST MAID: How did you like working for that college professor?

SECOND MAID: Aw, it was a rotten job. He was all the time quarreling with his wife, and they kept me busy running between the keyhole and the dictionary.

A COLORED cook came home after midnight from a revival meeting shouting at the top of her voice. Her employer, letting her in, said:

"Aunt Mandy, this is all foolishness. Religion shouldn't be so noisy. Tell that preacher of yours to give a sermon on the building of King Solomon's temple, which arose without even the sound of a hammer. And remember that real religion is quiet and peaceful."

"Lawd, honey!" answered Aunt Mandy. "Us niggers ain't aimin' to build no temple yit. We is jes' blastin' now!"

LITTLE daughter was sitting on her father's knee. She had a new little brother whom she regarded with wonder.

"Today," said her father, "a man offered to give me a whole lot of money for little brother. Shall I sell him?"

The child shook her head.

"But," said the father, "think how many nice things that money would buy."

"No," answered the little girl, "let's keep him till he's older. He'll be worth more then."

UPTOWN: Stingy, isn't he?

DOWNTOWN: Yes, yes. Why, he wouldn't even spend a week-end!

"RASTUS say Pahson Brown done kotch him in Farmer Smith's chicken-coop."

"M-m, boy! Don't Rastus feel 'shamed?"

"Nossuh. De pahson am de one feel 'shamed. He cain't splain how come he done kotch Rastus dar!"

WE'VE all heard about the absent-minded professor who poured the syrup down his back and scratched his pancake, but the one that worries us is the one who poured catsup on his shoelace and tied his spaghetti.

THE waitress was very much out of sorts. She sailed haughtily up to the table at which sat the grouchy customer. She slammed down the cutlery, snatched a napkin from a pile and tossed it in front of him. Then, striking a furious pose, she glared at him.

"Whatcha want?" she snapped.

"Couple of eggs," growled the diner.

"How ya want 'em?"

"Just like you."

A CONVERSATION recently overheard in a modern drug-store which deals in many things besides drugs:

"Gimme a tablet."

"What kind?"

"A yellow one."

"But what's the matter with you?"

"I want to write a letter."

AUNT: Can you explain wireless telegraphy to me, Arthur?

ARTHUR: Well, if you had a very long dog, reaching from London to Liverpool, and you trod on its tail in London, it would bark in Liverpool. That's telegraphy. And wireless is precisely the same only without the dog.

AN UNTIMELY frost effectually completed the mischief done earlier by the insect enemies of Mr. Perkins's potatoes. The tops of the plants, which had served as pasturage for the pests, were entirely destroyed, and with them Mr. Perkins's hopes of a crop. He was not selfish, however, and could think of others in the hour of adversity. In the afternoon he was accosted at the post-office by a friend.

"Hello, Perkins! How's everything up to the corners?"

"Trouble enough, Williamson, trouble enough!" was the gloomy response. "Ten million potato bugs, and nothing for 'em to eat!"

"WHAT do you mean by implying that I have dishonestly covered myself with the people's money?" demanded the city treasurer, as he rushed into the office of the local paper.

"What's the trouble?" casually queried the city editor.

"Here it is," indignantly continued the public official, pointing to a news item.

The item began: "William Binns, who is encrusted with the public funds . . ."

"I CAN'T stay home. Teacher will put me in the furnace," wailed little Janet Ruth the morning after a night of croup.

"Put you in the furnace?" repeated her mother blankly.

"That's what she said," wailed Janet Ruth huskily. "When I stayed out last week she said if I was out again she'd drop me from the register."